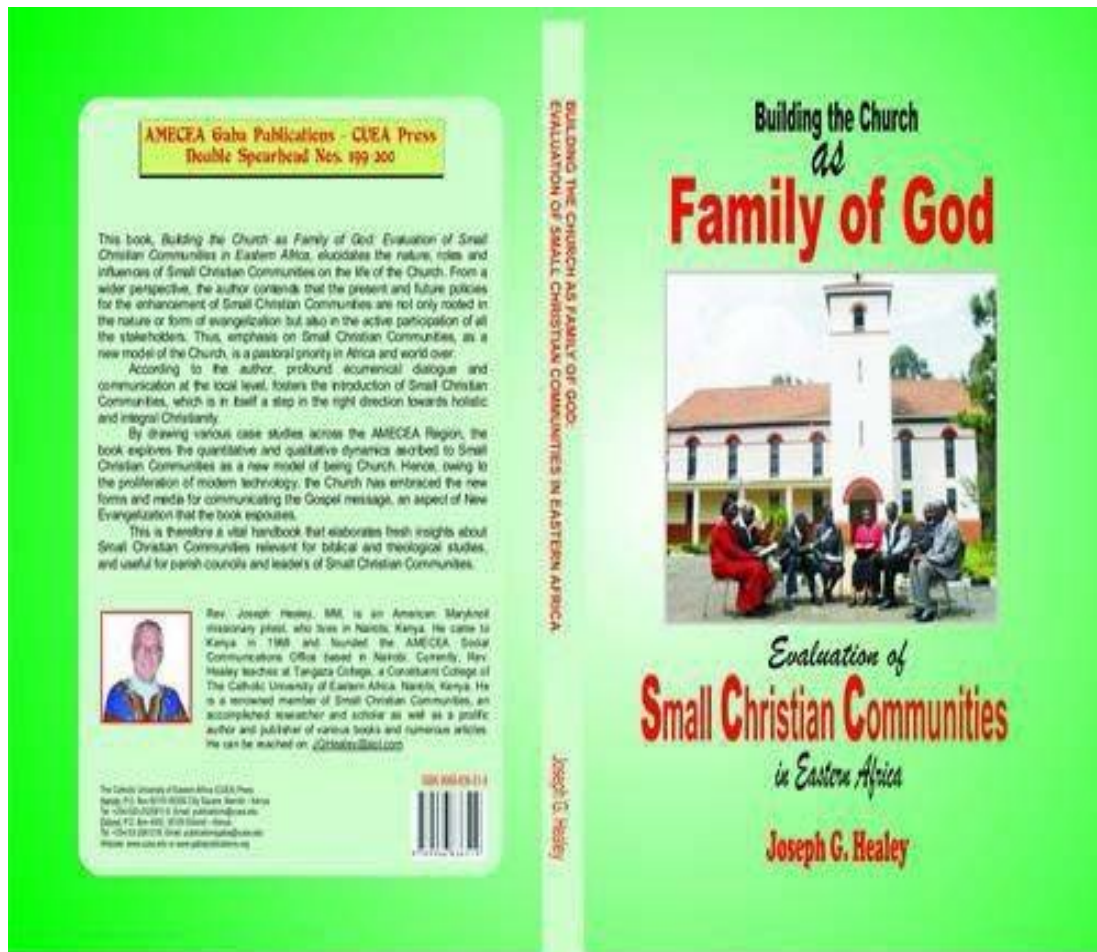


Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa

By Joseph G. Healey, MM



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Map of the Nine AMECEA Countries



Dedication

To the founders and visionaries who created [AMECEA](#)¹ Small Christian Communities (SCCs)² Key Pastoral Priority especially the Catholic bishops and other participants in the 1973, 1976 and 1979 AMECEA Plenary Meetings. Two of these bishops are Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, MAfr, the Bishop of Lilongwe Diocese in Malawi who died in 2012 and Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, the Bishop of Rulenge Diocese in Tanzania who died in 2002.³

¹ AMECEA is an acronym for "Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa." It is a service organization for the [Catholic] 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 Associations/Conferences of [SECAM](#) (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar).

Language is complicated. For many years the Catholic Bishops in Kenya were known as the Kenya Episcopal Conference. Then the number of Protestant Churches in Kenya, including Evangelical Churches and Pentecostal Churches mushroomed, some using the name "Episcopal" in their titles. The Secretary General of the [Catholic] Kenya Episcopal Conference would get phone calls such as: "Is this the Zion Episcopal Conference or the African Episcopal Church?" So the Kenyan Catholic Bishops changed their name to the clearer Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB).

² In Eastern Africa we capitalize the terms "Small Christian Community" (SCC) and "Small Christian Communities" (SCCs) because it is a key pastoral priority in our Catholic parishes and dioceses, the official pastoral policy of the Catholic bishops, a pastoral, ecclesial model of the Catholic Church and an official structure of the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa (AMECEA countries). In a Webinar on "Synodality in Africa" DRC Theologian Sister Josée Ngalula emphasized, "We already have a new and important pastoral structure in Africa on the grassroots level -- the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) or Basic Christian Communities (BCCs). We have to use and consolidate this basic structure to help us listen to the People of God especially lay men and lay women." Josée Ngalula, Webinar on "Synodality in Africa," 18 November, 2021. Quoted in Virtual International Church Reform Network (ICRN) General Conference "Around the Globe: What the Synod Process Looks Like in Different Parts of the World." Saturday, 29 January, 2022.

SCCs is a pastoral, ecclesial model of the Catholic Church in Africa. The new language is spiritual conversation, mutual listening and prayerful discernment. SCCs represent the spirit of Synodality and the Synodal Process.

³Other bishops who are among the first generation, pioneer founding fathers of SCCs in the AMECEA countries were Bishop Vincent McCauley, CSC (the Bishop of Fort Portal, Uganda who was both the Chairperson of AMECEA (1964-1973) and Secretary General of AMECEA (1973-1979) (who died in 1982), Bishop Joseph Blomjous, MAfr, the bishop of Mwanza Diocese, Tanzania (who died in 1992), Bishop James Holmes-Siedle, MAfr, the bishop of Kigoma Diocese, Tanzania (who died in 1995), Cardinal Maurice Otunga, the

To the millions of lay people in Eastern Africa who faithfully and joyfully participate in the weekly meetings and various activities of their Small Christian Communities.

archbishop of Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya (who died in 2003), Bishop Colin Davies, MHM, the bishop of Ngong Diocese, Kenya (who died in 2017), Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki the archbishop of Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya (who died in 2020) and Archbishop James Odongo, the archbishop of Tororo Archdiocese, Uganda and Chairperson of AMECEA from 1973-1979 (who died in 2020).

Bishops of recent years who have been deeply committed to SCCs include Bishop Joseph Mukwaya of Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese, Uganda (who died in 2008), Cardinal Medardo Mazombwe of Lusaka Archdiocese, Zambia (who died in 2013), Archbishop Boniface Lele of Mombasa Archdiocese, Kenya (who died in 2014), Bishop Rodrigo Mejia, SJ, the retired bishop of the Soddo Apostolic Vicariate, Ethiopia, Cardinal Polycarp Pengo, the retired Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Bishop Method Kilaini, the retired Auxiliary Bishop of Bukoba Diocese, Tanzania, Bishop John Oballa, the Bishop of Ngong Diocese, Kenya, Cardinal Antoine Kambanda, the Archbishop of Kigali Archdiocese, Rwanda, Bishop Charles Kasonde, the Bishop of Solwezi Diocese, Zambia and present Chairperson of AMECEA, Archbishop George Tambala, OCD, the Archbishop of Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi Archbishop Emmanuel Obbo, the Archbishop of Tororo Archdiocese, Uganda and Bishop Fritz Lobinger, the retired bishop of Aliwal Diocese in South Africa.

Of these 21 bishops 13 are diocesan bishops and eight belong to religious congregations and societies.

Acknowledgements

This book is a team effort, a community effort. Many, many people have contributed anecdotes, case studies, data, documents, examples, experiences, ideas, insights, quotations, resources, statistics, stories and suggestions as seen in the extensive list of names in the “Bibliography” and “Index.” I mention:

- The Catholic Bishops in the nine AMECEA countries who have taken ownership of this AMECEA Small Christian Communities Key Pastoral Priority during this 51-year (1973-2024) period.
- The African theologians who have articulated the theological framework for this new model of church from the bottom up. The frequency of their names in this Ebook indicate their importance and influence.
- The teams of SCC animators, facilitators, trainers and coordinators who have developed a Training of Trainers (TOT) or Training of Facilitators⁴ style of training and leadership.
- The members of the AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team (based in Nairobi, Kenya),⁵ the Small Christian Communities (SCCs)

⁴ Also called Training of Facilitators (TOF), a term that can be less daunting or threatening to people. We use the principal in the famous proverb, *give a person a fish and you feed the person for a day; teach a person to fish and you feed the person for a lifetime*. We provide people with SCCs tools and resources.

⁵ Presently the AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team under the coordination of the Pastoral Department of AMECEA has 16 members: 15 Africans (12 from Kenya, one from Zambia, one from Malawi and one from Tanzania), and one expatriate missionary based in the USA. There are seven laymen, three laywomen, five priests and one religious sister. The age range:

80s: 2

70s: 1

60s: 1

50s: 3

40s: 1

30s: 3

20s: 5

Their names in alphabetical order are: Emmanuel Chimombo, Joseph Healey, Rita Ishengoma, Peter Kyalo, Bernard Mberere, Moses Muriira, Lawrence Murori, Rose Musimba, Nancy Njehia, Francis Njuguna, Alloys Nyakundi, Alphonse Omolo, Collins Ongoma, Febian Pikiti, Pauline Wakibiru and Edwin Wesonga.

NOTE: In the ever shifting landscape of politically correct and inclusive language, “expatriate,” the common British word, or “international” is preferred to “foreign.”

Global Collaborative Website⁶ Coordinating Team⁷ and the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Email Mailing List⁸ and their collaborators who continue to evaluate the past, celebrate the present and explore the future.⁹

- St. Isidore of Seville International Online Skype SCC members.
- And especially the SCC members themselves who have shared with us and taught us so much about this new way of being (becoming) church.

⁶ The plan for the “Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website” was hatched during the National SCC Convocation in San Antonio, Texas, USA in August, 2002. It was officially begun as the “Small Christian Communities in North America Collaborative Website” by RENEW International in its office in Plainfield, New Jersey in 2004 under the coordination of Michael Brough, the Director of RENEW International with the domain name www.smallchristiancommunities.org. The website was handed over from Terry Ricard, the Director of RENEW International to Joseph Healey, the present Moderator of the website in 2008. From a continental website it became an international website with the name “Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website.”

Transferring the domain name and the digital files was complicated. The present copyright at the bottom of the Home Page is: “© [Copyright] 2004-2024 Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website. All rights reserved -- AMECEA Pastoral Department.” A very good explanation is found in Barbara Darling, “Small Christian Communities in North America Collaborative Website” (pages 182-184) in Joseph Healey, Chapter 26, “[Promoting SCCs Via the Internet](#),” in Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton (eds.), *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005 (Second Printing 2006, New Cover 2014); Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006 (1st Reprint 2011, 2nd Reprint 2012, 3rd Reprint 2017); and Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2006.

⁷ Presently the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website Coordinating Team has 13 members: women and men, different nationalities, different religious denominations, different ethnic groups and different ages.

⁸ Presently the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Email Mailing List has 40 members.

⁹ The complete list of SCCs Email Mailing Lists/SCCs Networks are:

- a. AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team.
- b. Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website Coordinating Team (names on the SCCs website plus key people).
- c. Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Email Mailing List.

Foreword

If Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are a “New Way of Being/Becoming Church,” then it is appropriate that this is a new way of writing a “Foreword.” We are not well-known people (important leaders or celebrities). We are seven ordinary Kenyan Catholic lay members of [St. Kizito SCC](#) located in Waruku, an informal settlement area (lower class housing) in Nairobi, Kenya. We are one of the 15¹⁰ neighborhood, parish-based SCCs in [St. Austin’s Parish](#)¹¹ in [Nairobi Archdiocese](#). We are five men and two women representing five ethnic groups¹² in Kenya. We have a variety of professions: three cooks, a farmer, a freelance photographer, a salesperson and a secretary. Our small group ranges from the chairperson (now called Moderator) to an ordinary member. One afternoon the seven of us got together to discuss the importance of SCCs and this book. Here is the fruit of our conversation.

Our St. Kizito SCC started in 2003 having branched off from the first and founding SCC in the parish called St. Austin’s SCC that covered the whole Waruku area. Four new SCCs were formed in this geographical area. Irish Spiritan missionary priest Father Martin Keane, CSSP was the pastor at the time. We chose [St. Kizito](#) as our Patron Saint because he is an African martyr who was young and active. He was baptized shortly before his death. We want to follow in his footsteps – innocent and courageous. Our SCC is linked to families and concerned about family life. We believe that the Catholic Church is part of the Family of God in Africa. We learn about the culture and traditions of our different ethnic groups in Kenya. We are sensitive to people’s rights. We encourage unity among Christians. In 2021 St. Kizito SCC became too big so we gave birth to St. Monica SCC. The paved road in Waruku is the dividing line between our two SCCs.

Spirituality is important to us. The *Bible* is essential and we share the Word of God every week. We strengthen and transform our community through prayer and retreats. Each SCC member becomes comfortable and confident in praying out loud and in leading our community prayers. One year we made a pilgrimage to the Namugongo Shrine in Uganda to celebrate our Patron Saint.

Our SCC is active in pastoral work in our parish. We encourage young couples to get married in church. One of our favorite activities is following the Outdoor Stations of the Cross with other SCCs on Good Friday. We are involved in the annual [Kenya Lenten Campaign](#). In 2011 we emphasized Week One on “Human Trafficking.” In 2012 and 2013

¹⁰ SCCs of Saints Ambrose, Augustine, Austin, Boniface, Charles Lwanga, Francis, John, Josephine Bakhita, Jude Thaddeus, Kizito, Mary, Michael, Monica, Padri Pio and Petro Mwamba.

¹¹ The website refers to outreach through small group ministries and St. Austin's Youth Community's teams of 15 members such as one interested in sports and one interested in dancing and singing.

¹² In the ever shifting landscape of politically correct and inclusive language, “ethnic group” is preferred today over “tribe” that can have a pejorative and negative meaning, even to being called “endemic tribalism.” Other terms used today are “ethnic community” and “people group.”

we studied civic education while preparing for the General Elections. We are concerned about our environment so tree planting and collecting garbage and trash have been part of our action projects. We try to have a missionary spirit and visit other SCCs in our parish.

St. Agatha Joy Women's Training and Tailoring Group is the name of the sewing club of women in our SCC.

We are honored that one of our members, [Father Joseph Healey, MM](#),¹³ whom we call *Mwanajumuiya Padri*¹⁴ Joseph ("SCC member Father Joseph" in Swahili) has written this important book and shared the life and experiences of SCCs. It tells the history of 190,000 SCCs in nine countries in Eastern Africa. 48,000 of these SCCs are here in Kenya. SCCs are the Catholic Church itself. Other Apostolic Groups in the parish are specialized and voluntary like the Catholic Men, Catholic Women, Choir, Legion of Mary, St. Vincent de Paul and Pontifical Missionary Childhood. But our SCCs are the foundation of the parish. They mixed and open to everyone – men, women and children – and to all social, economic and educational backgrounds.

This book of SCC experiences in the AMECEA Region Africa is our gift to you, the reader. We hope that you will learn a lot from this Ebook.¹⁵ Read about SCCs in all the countries in Eastern Africa and how they are a new pastoral model of church for Africa today. Enjoy this book. Feel at home. We invite you to share your own SCCs experiences with us and other readers. You can communicate with us through email (info@smallchristiancommunities.org) and our Small Christian Communities Global

¹³ From 1976 to the present I have been a full member or an honorary member of the following SCCs (alphabetically by the saint's name) that are physical SCCs, online SCCs or hybrid:

Charles Lwanga (3 June)

Isidore of Seville (4 April)

Jude Thaddeus (28 October)

Kizito (3 June)

Martin de Porres (3 November) – two different SCCs

Nyabuliga (a section of the village of Nyabihanga, Tanzania – the geographical place name used before saints' names become popular)

Nyagasense (a section of the village of Iramba, Tanzania – the geographical place name used before saints' names become popular)

Thérèse (Theresa of the Child Jesus) (1 October)

¹⁴ Padri: a priest or clergyman or "Father" in English.

Padre: Used as a form of address for a priest or "Father" in Italy, Spain, Portugal and Latin America.

¹⁵ Ebook is short for "electronic book," and uses either a computer, mobile device, or ebook reader to display long-form texts in book form. Ebooks have multiple digital "pages" that people can navigate through, and are often packaged as a PDF document so they can easily be sent from one user to another.

Collaborative Website (www.smallchristiancommunities.org) and our SCC “[Facebook Page](#).”¹⁶

Ubarikiwe (“May you all be blessed” in Swahili).

Catherine Katumbi
 Joseph Kihara
 Conrad Kimori
 Josphat Mulinya
 Sammy Ngunga
 Michael Orondo
 Annastasia Syombua
 Members of St. Kizito SCC, Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya
 22 October, 2011 (day before World Mission Sunday).
 Updated on 13 May, 2013 and updated again on 17
 April 2022.
 Nairobi, Kenya

¹⁶ Our SCCs Facebook Page started on 2 February, 2010. It is mentioned 59 times in different forms in this Ebook as of 18 September, 2019.

In 2015 Facebook has opened its first headquarters in Africa as it looks to add to its existing 120 million users on the continent. The new office in Johannesburg will focus on growing markets in Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. About one in five people in Africa have internet access, but almost double that figure are expected to have mobile internet connections by 2020. About 80% of those who use Facebook in Africa access the site by mobile phone.

General Introduction

This book has gone through various versions and editions.¹⁷ The **“First Version”** was given as a paper on “Small Christian Communities in the AMECEA Region: An Evaluation of their Growth and Impact” at the 13th Interdisciplinary Theological Session on the theme “The Faculty of Theology of [CUEA](#) Celebrates the Golden Jubilee of AMECEA” at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) in Nairobi, Kenya on 3 March, 2011. Many papers were presented at this conference covering the 50 years of AMECEA under three headings: Part I: “Deeper Evangelization. Part II: “Formation and Education.” Part III: “Church Life, Organization and Structures.”

I specifically treated the topic of “Small Christian Communities” under Part III. Many pastoral leaders including the AMECEA bishops recommended the importance of a thorough critical evaluation¹⁸ and assessment of SCCs to learn from the past and to help plan for the future. This includes ongoing strategic follow-up.¹⁹

¹⁷ “Versions” is used when the manuscript was going through various draft forms. “Editions” was used after it was printed for the first time and got an ISBN Number.

¹⁸ In many evaluations of AMECEA meetings, conferences and workshops, it has been emphasized that the preparation stage gets an A rating, the meetings, conferences and workshops themselves get an A rating, but the evaluation and implementation stage and follow-up/follow-down get only a C rating, and even at times a D+ rating. Specifically for SCC meetings, conferences and workshops this challenges us in include in the ongoing strategic plan evaluation and assessment, concrete step-by-step implementation, timelines, capacity building, benchmarks, accountability and ongoing financial support.

Fritz Lobinger commented on one of our AMECEA papers with many practical examples and implementation steps by saying: “I read the whole text and admire the great work of reporting the many details. The paper contrasts favorably with many theoretical essays which state the principles but makes you wonder how much these principles are implemented. I hope many agencies in Africa and elsewhere study the paper.”

¹⁹ This evaluation uses many methods and techniques such as the **SWOT Analysis** that is a strategic planning tool used to evaluate the **Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats** involved in any venture.

Another evaluation tool is to compare and contrast the “Real” and the “Ideal” or “Theory” and “Practice” or “Plan” and “Action.” Often a SCC project or activity looks very good on paper, but is very different in reality.

Another evaluation tool or discernment tool is the role of the Devil's Advocate that was formerly an official position within the Catholic Church: one who "argued against the canonization (sainthood) of a candidate in order to uncover any character flaws or misrepresentation of the evidence favoring canonization." In common parlance, the term Devil's Advocate describes someone who, given a certain point of view, takes a position he or she does not necessarily agree with (or simply an alternative position from the accepted norm), to explore the thought further, to expose it to a thorough examination. This is not a negative method, always against someone and something. This person helps to ask **CHECK**

We should not feel threatened by the term “evaluation” as though we are going to be criticized or held under a microscope. Evaluation should be constructive rather than critical, thus the expressions “constructive criticism” and “positive critique.”²⁰ The overall purpose is to how to improve our SCCs, how make our SCCs better, how to learn from our mistakes. A key is to first, to recognize our mistakes and failures.²¹ This includes appreciating the meaning of an “honest mistake.” Second, to learn from our mistakes and failures and especially not to repeat our mistakes and failures. It is also very important to overcome/bounce back from our mistakes and failures.²²

Related to evaluation is the term “post-mortem.” A project post-mortem is a process, usually performed at the conclusion of a project, to determine and analyze elements of the project that were successful or unsuccessful and the lessons learned. It has been popularized in discussing a sports event after it takes place and a newspaper after it has been published.

Good evaluation is based on grassroots experience. A key insight comes from the world-renowned American philosopher and educator John Dewey: “We do not learn from experience... We learn from reflecting on experience.”²³ He said that careful, critical reflection is essential for growth and development. We should use challenging questions, probe deeper, and evaluate deeper leading to improvement.

This includes asking challenging questions about SCCs. They are not meant to criticize or to be taken personally, but to make our SCCs better.

In many “Best Practices” exercises real and depth evaluation is often hard to come by. People are reluctant to give honest feedback for the reasons of being misunderstood or of offending other people.

²⁰ After evaluating a Young Adult Symposium, Sister Eleanor Gibson said, “If we do not critique, we do not improve.”

²¹ We should not be afraid to “wash our dirty laundry in public”/”wash our dirty linen in public” (British and Australian) or “air our dirty laundry in public”/”air our dirty linen in public” (American and Australian) --- meaning to reveal our mistakes and failures in public. Yet many Christian Church leaders in Africa don’t like to reveal their weaknesses, shortcomings, vulnerability in public. They easily become defensive. See the Gikuyu, Kenya proverb *Do not wash your dirty linen in public*.

The opposite saying is *to sweep something under the rug*, that is, to hide something damaging or unpleasant and try to keep it secret. Unfortunately this is often the position the Catholic Church in hiding a scandal (especially if it is sexual abuse or financial mismanagement). Transparency and openness are better.

²² A study was made of famous and successful business people. When asked what made them so successful the most common answers were: “We learned from our mistakes.” “We bounced back from failures.”

²³ Peirce adds, “Knowledge comes from participating in, rather than observing, the world we are trying to understand.”

It was published as “Small Christian Communities in the AMECEA Region: An Evaluation of Their Growth and Impact” in *The Faculty of Theology of CUEA Celebrates the Golden Jubilee of AMECEA*. General Editor: John Lukwata. 13th Interdisciplinary Theological Session (2011). Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2013.

The “**Second Version**” was updated based on new research and given to the bishops and other delegates at the 17th Plenary Assembly of AMECEA on the theme of “AMECEA Family of God Celebrating a Golden Jubilee of Evangelization in Solidarity” that took place at CUEA in Nairobi, Kenya from 27 June to 6 July, 2011.

The “**Third Version**” was updated based on the discussion and final resolutions of the AMECEA Study Session that recommended that an on-going evaluation be included in the revitalization of SCCs in Eastern Africa. It included new interviews with a number of bishops and other pastoral agents in the AMECEA Region. It was published in September, 2011 as a photocopied booklet of 95 pages for the staff and students of the Catholic universities in Kenya.

The “**First Edition**” (ISBN 9966-836-51-9, six chapters, 163 pages, 202 footnotes) was updated, revised and published as a paperback book as a Double *Spearhead* Nos. 199-200 by AMECEA Gaba Publications – CUEA Press in 2012. It included further research and a detailed analysis and commentary on Pope Benedict XVI’s 2011 Apostolic Exhortation *Africa’s Commitment*. In Number 136 this document states:

The Catholic Universities and Higher Institutes in Africa have a prominent role to play in the proclamation of the salvific Word of God. They are a sign of the growth of the Church insofar as their research integrates the truths and experiences of the faith and helps to internalize them. They serve the Church by providing trained personnel, by studying important theological and social questions for the benefit of the Church, by developing an African theology, by promoting the work of inculturation,²⁴ by publishing books.

This paperback book became popular and was reprinted in 2014. It was clear, however, that updating this book and publishing it in new print editions was very expensive, even prohibitive.

So this edition continued to be updated as a free, offline digital edition (that is also called an “Ebook” or an “Electronic Book”) on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website.²⁵ It included further research in 2012--2016 to implement the Apostolic Exhortation *Africa’s Commitment* and the priority of the New Evangelization, the 2013 Year of Faith, the 2014-2015 Year of the Family and Marriage and the 2015-2016 Jubilee Year of Mercy on the regional, national and local levels down to the SCCs on the grassroots level. It included applying the Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel* and

²⁴ At a meeting in Nairobi, Kenya it was said: “Inculturation is just as important in North Americas as it is in Africa.”

²⁵ The writing style, formatting, footnoting and bibliography follows a “user friendly” method of the author.

The Joy of Love to Eastern African SCCs. This edition included new interviews with pastoral agents in Eastern Africa on all levels and new Case Studies of SCCs.²⁶ The underlying principle is ongoing evaluation and systematic follow-up to make the SCCs in Eastern Africa better.

The “**Second Edition**” (ISBN 9781981045631, 17 chapters, 1,108 pages, 1396 footnotes) was published as a Ebook and Print on Demand paperback on Amazon in May, 2018. This edition includes extensive research in the United States in 2015-2018 on SCCs in parishes and in college campus ministry programs and the 2017-2018 Focus on Young People (Youth, College Students and Young Adults).

The “**Third Edition**” (ISBN 9798680914878, 18 chapters, 1,166 pages, 1,488 footnotes) was published as a Ebook and Print on Demand (POD) paperback on Amazon in August, 2020. This edition includes the 2018-2020 Focus on Young People (Youth, College Students and Young Adults) and Online Small Christian Communities.

The “**Fourth Edition**” (19 chapters, 1,521 pages, 1,514 footnotes) was published as a free, online Ebook on the SCCs Website on 21 December, 2023 and will be published as a Ebook and Print on Demand paperback on Amazon in late 2024. This edition includes Case Studies and experiences during the March, 2020-2023 Covid-19 pandemic and during the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops.

The free version of this digital Ebook is regularly updated offline from the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website and available online at: https://smallchristiancommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Build_new.pdf

²⁶ Over the period 2012—2024 new chapters were gradually added based on new data: “Promoting the Missionary Outreach of SCCs in the AMECEA Region.” “SCCs’ Involvement in the New Evangelization in Eastern Africa.” “SCCs Promote Family and Marriage Ministry in Eastern Africa.” “Tracking the Growth of Young People Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs).” “Online Small Christian Communities” and “The Role of SCCs in the Synodal Church in Africa.”

Today there are over 195,000²⁷ Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Catholic Church²⁸ in the nine AMECEA countries in Eastern Africa.²⁹ This book treats the following 18 headings:

²⁷ Our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team has done exhaustive research to arrive at this figure. We decided to include “prayer groups” in their many forms and varieties if they have the intention of transitioning and evolving into SCCs. Thus we began using a new talk in Eastern Uganda in May, 2015 called “From Small Neighborhood Prayer and Activities Groups (commonly called Basic Christian Communities in Uganda) Transitioning Into/Moving To/Evolving into Small Christian Communities (SCCs).”

²⁸ This book systematically evaluates SCCs in the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa only. There are many varieties of small groups, small communities and church small groups/small group churches in the Christian Churches in Eastern Africa that can be classified as follows:

- *Bible* Study Groups, Café Churches, Fellowship Groups, Home Fellowship Groups, Small Fellowship Groups, House Cell Fellowships and House Churches in the Anglican (Episcopalian) Church.
- Home Group Fellowships Small Groups that operate like Fraternal Communities in the Baptist Church.
- Small Cell Groups in the Mormon Church and Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church.
- Cell Churches, Cell Groups, Devotional Groups, Fellowship (called *Ushirika* in Swahili) Groups, Home Cells, Home Churches, House Churches (*Eglise de maison* in French), House Fellowships, Prayer Circles and Spiritual Growth Groups in the Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches.
- District Groups and Fellowship Groups in the Presbyterian Church.
- Cells in the Methodist Church.
- Church Homes in the United Church of Christ.

The cornerstone of most of these small groups or small prayer groups is the *Bible*. Most common is weekly *Bible* Study following an organized reading and study plan. At times there is *Bible* Sharing and *Bible* Reflection. Devotional small groups are increasing. Fellowship is very important especially in the African context including emphasis on community building, singing and socializing together.

One study tracks the small group explosion especially church small groups/small group churches in the 20th century:

1900-40 – setting up of study groups following the “1919 report.”

1940-70 – house groups (added a pastoral dimension to the study groups).

1960-2000 – small groups for mission and discipleship (influence of Latin America’s Base Christian Communities and South Korea’s Cell Church.) In this study in NE England over a third of churches identified themselves as having cells or seeking to be cell churches. See Cell UK and the 4ws. The Charismatic Movement and new churches also adopted small groups.

2001 survey -- found that 37% of English churchgoers said they belonged to a small group for prayer and *Bible* study, and only 1% said there is no opportunity in their church to join a small group.

September, 2014 notes of Alison Morgan on Roger Walton, *Disciples Together – Discipleship, Formation and Small Groups*, London: SCM Press 2014, retrieved on 27 February, 2015, <http://www.alisonmorgan.co.uk/Walton2014.pdf>

²⁹ There are also important distinctions in the Catholic Church worldwide between (“small” is presumed in most of the titles if not stated):

Small Christian Communities (SCCs).

Small Base Communities (SBCs).

Small Ecclesial Communities (SECs).

Small Faith Communities (SFCs). In Spanish: *Pequeñas Comunidades de Fe*.

Small Family Communities (SFCs).

Small Focus Communities (SFCs).

Small Parish Communities (SPCs).

Basic Christian Communities (BCCs).

Basic Church Communities (BCCs).

Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs).

Base Communities (BCs) – small neighborhood communities that meet weekly. Sometimes written as *Comunidades de Base (CBs)*.

Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs). Sometimes written as Ecclesial Base Communities (EBCs).

In Spanish: *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (CEBs)* or simply *Comunidades de Base (CBs)*.

In Portuguese-speaking Brazil: *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base (CEBs)*.

In Portuguese-speaking Africa: *Pequenas Comunidades Cristãs (PCCs)*.

In French: *Communautés Eclésiales de Base (CEBs)* or simply *Communautés de Base (CBs)* or *Petites Communautés Chrésiennes (PCCs)*.

Also in Spanish: *Pequeñas Comunidades Cristo (PCCs)*.

NOTE: The word “base” indicates “from the grassroots” or in sociological terms the “base” of the society (the economically poor and marginated). Base refers to the foundations, the roots of the social scale where people power can shake/influence the structures and established order from below. It highlights the preferential option for the poor that so characterizes these communities. It has a different meaning than “basic.” Many people wrongly equate “base” and “basic.” Base communities is especially the name used in Latin America for small neighborhood groups in economically poor areas that meet weekly. These groups are made up of families that are the Domestic Church. They live and minister in conjunction with the “ecclesial centers” that are the Ecclesial Church that is explained below.

The word “ecclesial” emphasizes that these communities are in themselves “church” – church at the most local level. They are the first and fundamental nucleus of the church and the initial cell/unit of the ecclesial structures. It is constituted of members as one cell of the greater community. In some Latin American countries and in the Philippines they are like ecclesial chapels or ecclesial centers where the sacraments are celebrated. They go by names such as Mass Center, Chapel, Missionary Center and Zone (that refers to the physical building as well as the geographical area/location).

For example, in Santiago, Chile a distinction is made between the weekly neighborhood Base Christian Community (BCC) also known as *Comunidades de Base* that meets in a home where the family is the Domestic Church (see my experience in Puente Alto

Parish in 1980) and the Base Ecclesial Community (BEC or CEB in Spanish) that is the Ecclesial Church that meets in a church building in a geographical zone where the sacraments are celebrated (see my experience in San Alberto Parish in 1980).

Maryknoll missionary priest Father Tom Henehan, MM writes:

In Chile I was fortunate to follow the ministry of Dick Braun, Tom Cronin and Jim Weckesser in the San Alberto Parish in Santiago, Chile. Dick had developed a two-year family catechetical program in the 1960s that generated Base Christian Communities (BCCs) also known as *Comunidades de Base* usually made up of 5-10 families that met in homes. These were nourished by the larger Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs -- the Spanish acronym is CEBs) where sacraments were celebrated and relationships with social movements were developed. The parish was made up of 16 CEBs each of which were organized around a chapel. The local bishop would come to the parish annually to install 120-130 lay ecclesial ministers that were the backbone of the pastoral ministry of the parish. (Tom Henehan email message to the author, 9 November, 2019).

Action-based Small Christian Communities (ABSCCs)
 Adult Small Communities (ASCs)
 Alumni Small Faith Based Communities (ASFBCs)
 Alumni Small Faith Communities (ASFCS)
 Alumni Small Faith Sharing Communities (ASFSCs)
 American-style Small Christian Community
 Basic Faith Communities (BFCs)
 Basic Human Communities (BHCs)
 Basic Parish Communities (BPCs)
 Bible Reading Groups (BRGs)
 Bible Study Groups (BSGs)
 Campus Small Communities (CSC)
 Catholic Base Communities (CBCs)
 Catholic Faith Communities (CFCs)
 Cell Churches (CCs)
 Cell Groups (CGs).
 Centering Prayer Groups (CPGs)
 Chewing on the Word Small Group
 The Chosen Small Groups (TCSGs)
 Christian Base Communities (CBCs)
 Christian Ecclesial Communities (CECs)
 Christian Life Communities (CLCs)
 Christian Small Groups (CSGs)
 Church in the Neighborhood Communities (CNCs)
 Coffee Meet-ups
 Co Groups
 Committed Christian Communities (CCCs)
 Community of Believers on Mission (COBOM)
 Conversation Circles (CCs)
 Digital Small Christian Communities (DSCCs).

Ecclesial Base Communities (EBCs).
 Faith Circles.
 Faith Communities.
 Faith Exploration Communities (FECs).
 Faith Households.
 Faith-sharing Small Communities (FSSCs).
 Family Church Model Small Communities (FCMSCs)
 Family Small Christian Communities (FSCCs)
 Focus Communities (FCs).
 Grassroots Christian Communities (GCCs).
 Group Groups (GGs)
 Home-based Communities (HBCs)
 Home Groups (HGs).
 House Churches (HCs)
 Household Churches (HCs).
 Household Church Communities (HCCs).
 House Meetings (HMs).
 Intentional Christian Communities (ICCs).
 Intentional Collaborative Communities (ICCs).
 Intentional Communities (ICs).
 Intentional Communities of Faith (ICFs).
 Intentional Eucharistic Communities (IECs).
 Interfaith Groups (IGs).
 Interfaith Small Communities (ISCs).
 Junior Small Christian Communities (JSCCs) or *jumuiya ya vijana*.
 Listening Circles (LCs).
 Ministry/Organization Small Communities.
 Multiethnic Small Communities (MSCs).
 Neighborhood Church Communities (NCCs).
 Neighborhood Gospel Groups (NGGs).
 Ongoing Small Groups (OSGs)
 Online Gospel Sharing Small Communities (OGSSCs)
 Online Small Christian Communities (OSCCs).
 Online Small Faith-sharing Communities (OSFCs).
 Lectionary-Based Faith Sharing Communities (LBFSC).
 Life Groups (LGs).
 Little Faith-sharing Communities (LFSCs).
 Living Base Ecclesial Communities. In French: *Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes de Base* (CEVBs). Also referred to as Basic Living Church Communities (BLCCs).
 Living Ecclesial Communities. In French: *Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes* (CEVs).
 Living Christian Communities (LCCs).
 Local Faith Communities (LFCs).
 Local Neighborhood-based Communities (LNCs)
 Parish-based Small Faith Communities (PSFCs)
 Parish Youth Groups (PYGs).
 Parish Young Adult Groups (PYAGs).
 Peer Group Young People Small Faith Sharing Communities (YPSFSCs).
 Popular Christian Communities (PCCs).
 Prayer Circles (PCs).

Prayer Shawl Group.
Real life faith discussion small group.
Scripture-based Conversations in the Spirit (SCSs)
Scripture-based Small Faith-sharing Communities (SSFCs)
Small Apostolic Groups (SAGs)
Small *Bible* Sharing Groups (SBSGs).
Small Bible Study Groups (SBSGs).
Small Catholic Communities (SCCs).
Small Christian Base Communities (SCBCs)
Small Christian Faith-sharing Communities (SCFSCs).
Small Christian Groups (SCGs).
Small Church Communities (SCCs).
Small Circles (SCs)
Small Circles of Hope (SCHs).
Small Communities (SCs).
Small Communities of Believers (SCBs).
Small Communities of Faith (SCFs).
Small Communities of Faith-sharing (SCFSs).
Small Communities of Young People (SCYPs).
Small Communities of Young Seekers (SCYSS).
Small Discernment Communities (SDCs).
Small Ecclesial Communities (SECs).
Small Ecclesial Groups (SEGs).
Small Ecumenical Communities (SECs).
Small Faith Groups (SFGs).
Small Faith Reflection Groups (SFRGs).
Small Faith Sharing Communities (SFSCs).
Small Faith Sharing Groups (SFSGs) or Small Groups of Faith-sharing (SGFS).
Small Family Communities (SFCs)
Small Formation Groups (SFGs)
Small Fraternal Communities of Faith (SFCFs)
Small Fraternal Local Communities (SFLCs)
Small Household of Faith (SHFs).
Small Human Communities (SHCs).
Small Intentional Communities (SICs).
Small Intentional Eucharistic Communities (SIECs).
Small Intentional Mission Communities (SIMCs).
Small Interfaith Communities (SICs).
Small Lay-led Communities (SLCs)
Small Local Church Communities (SLCCs).
Small Local Faith Communities (SLFCs)
Small Local Gatherings (SLGs).
Small Mission Communities (SMCs).
Small Model of Church (SMC).
Small Neighborhood Communities (SNCs).
Small Parish Communities (SPCs).
Small, Parish Based Communities (SPBCs).
Small Prophetic Mission Communities (SPMCs).
Small Reading Groups (SRGs).

- SCCs in the Historical Perspective of 62 Years (1961 to 2023) in the AMECEA Region.”
- “Quantitative Evaluation of the Growth of SCCs in the AMECEA Region.”
- “Qualitative Evaluation of the Growth of SCCs in the AMECEA Region.”
- “Seven Case Studies of SCCs in Eastern Africa.”
- “SCCs Promote Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Eastern Africa.”
- “SCCs’ Contribution to the Praxis and Theology of the Church as Family of God in Eastern Africa.”
- “Evaluation of the Impact of SCCs in the AMECEA Region.”
- “Evaluation of the Influence of AMECEA’s SCCs in Africa and Around the World.”
- “The Future is Now: Using the Internet to Promote SCCs in Africa and Around the World.”

Small Reflection Communities (SRCs).
 Small Rural Faith Communities (SRFCs).
 Small Scripture Based Faith Sharing Communities (SSBFSCs).
 Small Searching (Seekers) Communities (SSCs).
 Small Sharing Groups (SSGs).
 Small Study Groups (SSGs).
 Small Table Sharing Communities (STSCs)
 Small Units of our Christian Faith.
 Small Video Communities (SVCs).
 Small Young Seekers Communities (SYSCs).
 Special group within the Catholic Church.
 Synodal Conversation Circles (SCCs)
 Table Circles (TCs)
 Table Discussion Groups (TDGs).
 Truly Synodal Small Faith Communities (SSFCs).
 Virtual Small Christian Communities (VSCCs).
 Weekly Alumni Small Faith Based Communities (ASFBCs)
 Weekly Alumni Small Faith Communities (ASFCs)
 Weekly Alumni Small Faith Sharing Communities (ASFSCs)
 Weekly Small Community Scripture Reflections (SCSRs)
 Young Adults Small Christian Communities (YASCCs).
 Young Adults Small Empowerment Communities (YASCCs).
 Young People Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs).
 Young People Small Faith Sharing Communities (YPSFSCs).
 Young Professionals Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs).
 Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs).
 Zoom Small Communities (ZSCs)

With help from Argentinian diocesan priest and Maryknoll Priest Associate of the Latin America Region Father Alejandro Marina, conversation with the author, Nairobi, Kenya, 17 May, 2014 and American Maryknoll priest Father Tom Henehan, conversations over many years.

Aside from this official Catholic Church vocabulary there are many terms and expressions used in the secular media, for example: “Small Christian Community – a cell group of faithful living in the same vicinity” (*The Nairobiian*, 8-14 August, 2014, p. 4).

- “Online Small Christian Communities.”
- “Promoting the Missionary Outreach of SCCs in the AMECEA Region.”
- “SCCs’ Involvement in the New Evangelization in Eastern Africa.”
- “SCCs Promote Family and Marriage Ministry in Eastern Africa.”
- “Tracking the Growth of Young People³⁰ Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs).”
- “How SCCs Are a New Way of Being/Becoming Church in Eastern Africa.”³¹
- ”How SCCs Are a New Pastoral Model of Church in Eastern Africa.”
- “The Role of SCCs in the Synodal Church in Africa.”
- “Future Challenges, Priorities and Actions for SCCs in the AMECEA Region.”
- “General Conclusions: The Way Forward.”

There is an important Appendix on “Online Resource Materials on On-going Formation and Training of SCC Members” that can be used in workshops, seminars,

³⁰ We should be aware of shifting terminologies and meanings. The *Preparatory Document* for the October, 2018 synod stated: “The word ‘youth’ refers to persons who are roughly 16 to 29 years old, while bearing in mind that the term needs to be adapted to local circumstances. In any case, it is good to remember that the term ‘youth,’ in addition to referring to persons, is a stage of life that each generation understands in an unequal, original manner.”

Terminology varies according to the local place and context. Worldwide, “young people” is the umbrella term that covers:

- a. “Youth” (often referring to teenagers, adolescents and those in high school),
- b. college students and
- c. “Young adults” (after college in their 20s).

On the advice of young people around the world, Vatican documents on the synod have now officially shifted from using “youth” to using “young people.”

In Swahili, the main language of Eastern Africa, *vijana* (often translated as “youth”) covers the 16 to 35 age bracket. While the dictionary allows “youths” in the plural, by far the most common use is to use “youth” as a plural noun.

Due to the cultural context in Eastern Africa we are using the terms:

Young People Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs) as the umbrella term.

Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) for SCCs in secondary schools/high schools.

Young Adults Small Christian Communities (YASCCs) for the post college years that includes Young Professionals Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs).

³¹ Ugandan diocesan priest Frederick Tusingire insightfully points out: “The Catholic Church will have attained maturity when the ideals of these communities have been achieved, and SCCs are no longer considered as the new way of being church, but as the usual and real way of being church.” Frederick Tusingire, *The Evangelization of Uganda: Challenges and Strategies*, Kisumu: Marianum Publishing Company, 2003, p. 206.

meetings and talks. Presently there are 27 Resources ranging from “Checklist of 16 Common Activities” to “13 Steps in the SCCs Weekly *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection/*Bible*—Daily Life Connections Service”³² to “Choices in the SCCs POLL” to “Examples of SCCs Demonstrations, Role Plays, Questions and Exercises” to “Sample of the Program/Timetable of a SCCs Workshop” to “Two Sample Constitutions of SCCs.” There are seven methods of *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection, two of which have been translated into Swahili.

In this book I describe the ministry of the 16 member AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team (five priests, one Religious Sister, eight laymen and two laywomen) and an additional informal SCCs Research Teams that helps on research, evaluation and assessment. I draw on my long experience in Africa. I came to serve in the AMECEA Office in Nairobi, Kenya in 1968 as the first Social Communications Secretary of AMECEA from 1968 to 1974. I have been involved, directly and indirectly in seven World Synods of Bishops. Over the years I have served at various AMECEA activities, meetings and events in official and unofficial capacities. Bishops Vincent McCauley referred to me as one of AMECEA’s Roving Ambassadors.

Thus I have been privileged to serve the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa for 56 years of AMECEA’s history (1968-2024). I am grateful that I still recall a lot of the active institutional memory of AMECEA. If someone has done something for a long time, the extended meaning of a Swahili idiom says that *the person has eaten a lot of salt*. So I am happy to have eaten a lot of salt in serving AMECEA and the development of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa.

A summary of my 26 African names (alphabetically)³³ gives an interesting insight to my life and ministry during my 54 years serving in Africa (1968-2022) and especially how Africans see me. Behind each name³⁴ there is a rich story. Most of these names were given to me. A few I chose myself:

1. *AMECEA Roving Ambassador*. Bishop Vincent McCauley, the Secretary General of AMECEA, gave me this name. Over the years I have tried to promote and to make known the vision and practice of the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa around the world.

2. *Bwana Fili* (Swahili, East and Central Africa). In the years that I served as the Social Communications Secretary of AMECEA (1968-1974), I would travel with a large black leather case/file holder overstuffed with files and papers. When Father Valerian Laini, the Social Communications Secretary of the Tanzania Catholic Secretariat in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania saw me coming, he would joke, “here come *Bwana Fili* (Swahili for “Mr. Files”).

³² After a great deal of research we distinguish between *Bible* Sharing and *Bible* Reflection – the latter usually is a deeper experience that connects the *Bible* to daily life and includes Faith-sharing.

³³ Further research indicates that all 26 names are nouns.

1. 18 names are personal characteristics/behavior/activity/place.
2. 5 names are based on the time of day or the weather when I was born.
3. 3 names are based on the African culture (family and clan).

³⁴ In a conversation with Indian scholar Anil Khamis in Nairobi, Kenya on 5 August, 2018, he explained that most African names are based on kinship/relationship or an event/activity (day of week, time of day, event that occurred on that day). Most of my names fit this pattern.

3. *Bwana Kazi* (Swahili, East and Central Africa). Gradually the large black leather case/file holder that I carried around during my years at AMECEA Office became a symbol of my working hard so I also got the name *Bwana Kazi* (Swahili for “Mr. Work”).

4. *Kijana wa Zamani* (Swahili, East and Central Africa). I am now 86 years old. At our first class on Small Christian Communities (SCCs) at Tangaza University in Nairobi, Kenya the students, all in their 20s, started calling me *mzee* (the Swahili word for “elder”) as a title of respect. You remember that *Mzee* was the name of the elder lion in *The Lion King*. But I said, “No. No. Not yet. Not yet. Please give me another name.” So, the next day they started calling me *kijana wa zamani* that means “a youth from a long time ago.” I like that better. Another version is *mzee kijana* that translates literally as “elder youth,” but also means “a youth from long ago.”

5. *Kipkoech* (Kalenjin, Kenya). Means “dawn.” In the Kalenjin tradition a person is officially named after the time of day when he or was born.

6. *Kofi* (Akan, Ghana). In Ghana a person is officially named by the day of the week that he or she was born. I was born on Friday so I am called *Kofi*.³⁵

7. *Mabula* (Sukuma, Tanzania): The Sukuma seminarians at the Maryknoll Formation House in Nairobi asked if they could give me a second Sukuma name. They choose *Mabula* that means “born in the rainy season.” It is tonal so very hard to pronounce with an emphasis on the first syllabus.. A silent “h” precedes the “b.”

8. *Mogaka* (Gusii, Kenya and Kuria, Kenya/Tanzania): The Gusii people in Kenya have close relationship with the Kuria people in Kenya and Tanzania. For the Gusii *Mogaka* is both a family or kinship name and a title of respect meaning “elder.” For the Kuria it is a title of respect meaning “elder.” In African languages the word “elder” often more than just

³⁵ Kofi is an important name in Ghana. Kofi Anan was the Secretary General of the United Nations. There are well-known writers, musicians and sport stars with the name. My friend the Methodist minister and theologian Kofi Amoateng explains:

The Akan names are not just day names. They also constitute the creation narratives (see Daniel Oduro-Mensah in *Akanism and Hebrewism: Akan-Mesopotamian Links and Earlier Civilization*). The Akan original name for God is “Kwa”. One would realize that all the names of Akan people, apart from males born on Fridays, start with “Kwa”. See the following:

1. Sunday = “Kwasiada” = the day God descended to begin creation. A person born on this day is Male = Kwasi; Female = Akosuo.
2. Saturday = Memeneda = the day of satisfaction. A male born on Saturday is “Kwame” = God became satisfied (with His creation).
3. Friday = Efieda = the day God “homed” human beings as caretakers of His creation. On Friday God created humans and gave them creation as their home. A male born on Friday is Kofi. Kofi = Kwafieda = God’s “homing” of human beings day. Therefore, Kofi people have a settled life. They are stable people.

an “old person” or an “aged person.” In traditional African society the “Council of Elders” was a leadership structure and even today the elders have special authority and responsibilities in such customs such as circumcision, marriage, funerals, etc. For the Gusii people it also means someone who cares for another person/takes care of another person/is concerned about another person.

9. *Muiio* (Kamba, Kenya). The Kamba elders in Machakos gave me this name that means “peace” feeling that I am a person who loves peace.

10. *Mwanafunzi* (Swahili, East and Central Africa). To be faithful to this new way of being church³⁶ my main credibility as a priest is that I am an ordinary and regular member of St. Kizito Small Christian Community in the Waruku Section of St. Austin’s Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya. I am not the boss. The lay people are the leaders of our SCC. I am happy to be a student, a learner. As we say in Swahili: “*Mimi ni mwanafunzi*” (“I am a student”). In African culture I will always be an outsider, a foreigner, a learner, a student. I learn from my African friends and the African culture.

11. *Mwanajumuiya* (Swahili, East and Central Africa). As I travel around Eastern Africa facilitating SCCs Workshops, I am called *mwanajumuiya* that means “a member of a SCC” (not “child of a SCC”). A really committed, totally dedicated SCC member is called *Mwanajumuiya Damu Damu* that literally means “a member of a SCC blood blood.” This comes from how really committed, totally dedicated Catholics were described in Moshi, Tanzania and other traditional Catholic areas as *Mkristo Damu Damu* that literally means “a Christian blood blood.” Often I introduce myself as *Mwanajumuiya Padri Joseph Healey*.

12. *Mwenda* (Meru, Kenya). I facilitated a Small Christian Community Workshop in Meru, Kenya in April, 2016. It was a lively, inactive workshop and my sharing and input were greatly appreciated. On the last day of the workshop the leaders gave me the name *mwenda* meaning in Kimeru “the one who is loved.”

13. *Mzungu -- Padri Mzungu* (Swahili, East and Central Africa).. The African children like to call out to me “*mzungu, mzungu*” that means a “foreigner” or a “white person” when I pass by. The polite ones called me *Padri Mzungu*. I would answer back “*Mimi sio mzungu, mimi ni Mwafrika*” that means “I am not a foreigner, I am an African.” I have fun especially with the young boys and girls. I would ask one of them to hold out his or dark brown or black arm and compare it to my white arm. I would ask him if he gets a cut on his arm what happens. He says, “red blood appears.” “And if I get a cut on my arm? I reply. He answers, “red blood appears.” I smile and say, “So we are the same.”

14. *Networker* (English, Kenya): When I started the Social Communications Office of AMECEA in Nairobi in 1968, I was naturally referred to as a “communicator.” But with the importance today of the digital world, the internet³⁷ and social media, I am now more accurately called a “networker.”

³⁶ This expression is used in many different ways and contexts in the Catholic Church today.

³⁷ The preferred spelling today of “internet” is with a small “i” (that is, lower case). The principle is that when a new communications medium is in its first generation it is

15. *Nsemi ombago* (Sukuma, Tanzania). After many years of serving with Father Don Sybertz, MM on the Sukuma Research Committee with headquarters at the Sukuma Cultural Centre, Bujora, Mwanza, Tanzania, the Sukuma elders gave me this name that literally means: *The person who makes marks on the trees* and figuratively: *The person who makes/builds. The person who has good personal relationships and friendships with other people. The person who communicates/networks well.* It comes from a Sukuma proverb/story. The Sukuma story is called “The Parable of the Two Brothers.” From this Sukuma story comes the Sukuma proverb: *To make marks on the trees.* The theme of the story and the proverb is “Good Personal Relationships in Life.” The meaning is that to make/build good personal relationships and friendships with people is a very important priority in our lives.

16. *Omondi* (Luo, East Africa). After living in Kenya for many years a Luo elder said, “it is time for you to have a Luo name.” In the Luo tradition a person is officially named after the time of the day when he or she was born. I was embarrassed that I didn’t know when I was born. I wrote my brother in the USA and he sent me a copy of my birth certificate. I was born in Detroit, Michigan, USA at 6:45 a.m. (early morning) on Friday, 29 April, 2018. So I become *Omondi* (person born in the early morning). So my full name is Joseph *Omondi* Graham Healey. It is interesting that if I had been born a few minutes earlier I would have received the Luo name for “dawn,” that is, I would have been born at dawn/sunrise.

17. *Padri Dot.Com* (English, Kenya): Concerning the computer, internet, social media and the whole digital world, I have always thought I was old-fashioned, pre-historic, behind the times and being dragged kicking and screaming into the new online/virtual/digital world. But others think that I am making a valiant effort to keep up with the younger generation and even come to me for advice and suggestions (that’s a laugh!). I use the Dutch proverb *In the land of the blind the one-eyed person is king.* Along the way I began teaching our SCCs Course partially online so I got the name *Padri Dot.Com*. Now I am challenged to keep learning so that I don’t lose my not-deserved reputation.

18. *Phiri* (Chewa, Malawi): Most researchers say “*Phiri*” means “Mountain” in Chewa and Tonga. This surname has spread all over southern Africa. For many years I did not have a Chewa name although I had many Malawian friends and associates. Then a Malawian priest studying at CUEA in Nairobi said, “Your Chewa name should be *Phiri* that is a well known and respected name.” Others agreed. That was that.

19. *Ssentamu* (Luganda, Uganda). Bishop Joseph Mukwaya, then Father Mukwaya, succeeded me as the second AMECEA Social Communications Secretary. We became close friends. He was a member of the Buffalo Clan of the Baganda Ethnic Group in Uganda. He arranged for me to be officially initiated into his Buffalo Clan in Mityana, Uganda and I received the Luganda name *Ssentamu* that means “large cooking pot.” It was the name of his deceased older brother. Here is an extraordinary coincidence. Before the initiation ceremony in 1990 we visited Joe Mukwaya's home parish of Nattyole in Uganda. At the entrance to the parish we met the primary school headmaster in the rain. Spontaneously the bishop asked him what name I should receive. Out of the blue he answered: “*Ssentamu.*”

capitalized. Then after a certain number of years of popular usage it becomes lower case. See the history of “radio” and “television.”

20/21. *Student/Learner*. At meetings and on Zoom Calls I like to introduce myself as a *Student/Learner* for two reasons that are connected to my two main missionary ministries in Eastern Africa. First, in studying African culture and traditions (for example, African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories) the Africans are my teachers and I am a *Student/Learner*. Second, in the Small Christian Communities Model of Church the lay people are the leaders and we priests, sisters and brothers are the *Students/Learners*.

22. *Troublemaker*. Another name I like to be called is “troublemaker.” I like to ask hard questions of myself and others. This includes fighting against a clerical, hierarchical, patriarchal, exclusive Catholic Church. Against women being second class. Against various injustices. Asking hard questions to make the SCC Model of Church better.

23. *Tsetse fly*. During my 55 year journey in Africa I have been called other names. One I particularly enjoy is “tsetse fly.” When my good friend Don Sybertz was finishing his booklet *Tears of Joy*, John Mbonde, the other editor and I, used to hound him to finish. So Don called us tsetse flies and referred to the Sukuma proverb *I have been bitten by a tsetse fly*. This humorous Sukuma proverb in Tanzania refers to a person who relentlessly pesters another person until he or she pays off a debt. There is a similar Sukuma proverb that says *To promise an eye to a blind person* meaning that the blind person will pester you until you fulfill your promise. The proverb also refers to a person who, like a tsetse fly, persistently and relentlessly keeps coming after you again and again until he or she gets what the person wants. Well, we kept after Don until he finished the booklet in three languages – Sukuma, Swahili and English. In the “Introduction” he thanked “Fr. Joe Healey and John Mbonde for their constant and persistent nagging that gave me the impetus to write this story.”

24. *Wafula* (Luyia,³⁸ Kenya). After living in Kenya for many years a Luyia Family living in Nairobi said I needed a Luyia name. I was born in April that is traditionally a month of rain and the planting season. So the choice was obvious – *Wafula* that means “born in the rainy season.” The wife Agnes was born in April so she has the feminine equivalent *Nafula*. The couple’s second born son was also born in April and received the name *Wafula*. It took me a long time to learn that the accent is on the first syllable.

This Luyia name gave me a new appreciation of being born in the rainy season and how so much of African life is connected to rain and to the agricultural cycle.

25. *Wamwaki* (Gikuyu, Kenya). For some years I facilitated SCC Workshops in the Gikuyu-speaking parishes in Kenya. I do not know Gikuyu language. Several Kikuyu friends suggested possible names for me that were variations of being a member of the SCC in Gikuyu. Finally a Kikuyu elder in Limuru, Kenya named Paul Karanja Wamwaki said that I deserved a specific Gikuyu name: Wamwaki. *Mwaki* literally means “fire” in Gikuyu. In traditional Kikuyu society the small community gathered around the fire/fireplace/hearth. It was the place to teach African values, discuss and approve important community issues and perform local ceremonies. A neighborhood community was also called *mwaki* from the way that people made a fire and shared that fire. When the fire had been lit in one home, all the other homes in the neighborhood took their fire from that one place. This sharing of fire helped the people to identify themselves as one community. *Mwaki* or “fire” was symbolic of sharing and communion. So it became the common word for SCC. So I was given the name *wamwaki* that means “a member of a *mwaki* or SCC.” Everyone says it is the perfect name for me. Paul Karanja Wamwaki said that now I need the full Kikuyu Initiation Ceremony when the SCC members slaughter a goat and have other rituals.

³⁸ Also can be spelled Luhya.

26. *Zoom Priest -- Zoom Padri* (English, USA). During the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic Zoom became very important as a secure, reliable video platform that powers our communication needs including meetings, chat, phone, webinars, and online events. I celebrate a Catholic mass on Zoom every Sunday for family and friends. I participate in Zoom Gatherings of different kinds every week. So my family gave me the nickname the Zoom Priest.

It is very timely that this critical evaluation and assessment first started in the same year as the 17th Plenary Assembly (Golden Jubilee) of AMECEA on the theme of “AMECEA Family of God Celebrating a Golden Jubilee of Evangelization in Solidarity” that took place at the [Catholic University of Eastern Africa \(CUEA\)](#) in Nairobi, Kenya from 27 June to 6 July, 2011. There has also been additional ongoing evaluation and assessment in 2012-2024. December, 2023 marks the Golden Jubilee of SCCs in the AMECEA Region (1973—2023). The continuing growth of SCCs as a key pastoral priority is a concrete way of continuing the AMECEA jubilee celebrations at the beginning of its second 50 years.

We have a saying in the nine AMECEA countries: "SCCs are not just a program or project in the parish, but a way of life."³⁹ That is why we resist giving a definition of a SCC. It is better to describe SCCs in a variety of ways in relation to their local contexts in Eastern Africa. Here are some helpful “descriptions”⁴⁰ gathered over the years:

- A SCC is a small neighborhood, parish-based group in an urban or rural area in Eastern Africa that is a pastoral model of church that transforms the parish into a communion of communities and an instrument of evangelization.
- A SCC is a small group of around 10-15 people who meet weekly usually in their homes (but sometimes in a parish, a school or another institution) and/or online, to reflect on the *Bible* especially the Gospel of the following Sunday, and connect it to their daily lives in Eastern Africa.

³⁹ This is illustrated in a story told by Polish theologian Father Christopher Cieslikiewicz, OFM Conv when he was writing his doctorate thesis on SCCs in Africa at the Lateran University in Rome. When he arrived in Rome, Italy to start his doctoral studies, the first question he was asked was "What football [soccer] team do you root for?" He discovered that Italians are very passionate about their teams such as Roma, Lazio, Juventus and AC Milan. When he went to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania to do his doctorate research, the first question he was asked was "What *Jumuiya* (Swahili for SCC) do you belong to?" He discovered that Catholics in Dar es Salaam are also very passionate about their Small Christian Communities.

⁴⁰ Some commentators distinguish between SCCs (“a face-to-face gathering of six to 12 people who invest time with one another for the common purpose of applying gospel values to every aspect of their lives”), seasonal small groups and ministerial communities. See Kleissler, Thomas A, Margo A. Lebert and Mary C. McGuinness, *Small Christian Communities: A Vision of Hope for the 21st Century*, Mahweh: Paulist Press, 2002, p. 66.

- A SCC is the church in the neighborhood in Eastern Africa where Christians share the same local situation with other neighbors not only during weekly meetings but on a day-to-day basis.
- A SCC is a caring, sharing, faith reflecting, praying and serving community in Eastern Africa in which ongoing Christian formation and practical pastoral and social outreach takes place.
- A SCC is a small group that focuses on Scripture, faith-sharing⁴¹ and prayer and service to the greater community in Eastern Africa.
- A SCC is a small group of people who come together in the most basic and personal unit of the parish in Eastern Africa. The community gathers in the available homes of its members to discuss their lives in the light of the gospel and share their Christian faith through prayer and service to others.
- A SCC is a small community that engages in evangelizing its members so that subsequently they can bring the Good News to others; prays and listens to God's Word; encourages its members themselves to take on responsibility, learns to live an ecclesial life; and reflects on different human problems in the light of the Gospel.

To celebrate this key pastoral priority we have a slogan or cheer that is inculturated in different African languages. We will use Swahili. We say “*Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo, Oyee!*”⁴² That means “Small Christian Communities, Hooray!” Let’s try it. “*Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo...Oyee!*” Again. “*Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo...Oyee!*”

⁴¹ Many Catholics are not comfortable with faith-sharing/sharing one’s faith in direct and public ways. They say they are not worthy, not qualified. They do not want to feel vulnerable. To make it real we are called to share our struggles, our weaknesses, our questions, our doubts, the bumps on the road of our faith journey/our journey of faith.

⁴² Another popular cheer or greeting is: One person says “Small Christian Communities... The other person responds: “The instrument of evangelization.” The Swahili is: *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo...chombo cha uinjilishaji.*

1. SCCs in the Historical Perspective of 63 Years (1961 to 2024) in the AMECEA Region

When we look through the window of our 1961 to 2011 50-year jubilee period in AMECEA, and now 13 years beyond, surprisingly, Small Christian Communities SCCs)⁴³ in Africa fill this entire historical window.⁴⁴ An interesting “Timeline” in the history and

⁴³ Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is an umbrella term used in this book and is the common expression for this new way of being/becoming church in Eastern Africa. Different terms are used in English on the continent of Africa. BCC means “Basic Christian Community” and BEC means “Base [Basic] Ecclesial Community” and is sometimes written “Ecclesial Base [Basic] Community.” Even some writers in French prefer the term SCC because it indicates the “scale” of the communities. A variety of names are used in the USA. I have visited parishes and institutions in the USA where the specific name “Small Christian Communities” is not known or used, that is, it has very little “Name or Brand Recognition.” Yet people would immediately recognize “small groups” or “small prayer groups” or “Small Church Communities” or “Small Faith Communities” or “Small Bible Study Groups.” The challenge is to create successful “branding.” For example, “*jumuiya*” (the short form of Small Christian Communities in Swahili) is immediately known in East Africa.

A background paper for the “International Consultation on Rediscovering Community” at Notre Dame, Indiana in the USA in December, 1991 compiled over 3,500 different names, titles, terms and expressions for SCCs/BCCs worldwide:

Joseph Healey, “Evolving A World Church from the Bottom Up: An Analysis and Interpretation of 3,500 Different Names, Titles, Terms, Expressions, Descriptions and Meanings for and about Small Christian Communities/Basic Christian Communities in the World with 11 Case Studies From Six Continents,” Background Paper for the International Consultation on “Rediscovering Community -- International Perspectives,” University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana, USA, 8-12 December, 1991, Notre Dame: Photocopied Paper, 33 pages. Sections of this paper were published in Agatha Radoli, (ed.), *How Local is the Local Church? Small Christian Communities and Church in Eastern Africa*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, *Spearhead* 126-128, 1993. pp. 59-103 and the *Newsletter of Latin American/North American Church Concerns (LANACC)*.

This research was informally updated in 2021 to include over 5,500 entries with many new Names, Titles, Terms, Expressions, Descriptions and Meanings added. This expresses the rich diversity of this new way of being/becoming church.

Research shows that the names vary due to different histories, contexts and pastoral situations. What is important is the best name for the local situation, the local context. A useful distinction is: “**Basic Communities** usually emphasize social change by the power of Christ's gospel. **Church Homes** are focused on building up marriage and family life. **Cell Groups** are designed to evangelize the world by multiplying new groups.” Presentation Ministries Website, retrieved on 19 March, 2012.

<http://www.presentationministries.com/brochures/IntroCommunity.asp>

⁴⁴ An important historical context is how African Christianity has developed in the past two centuries on three parallel tracks: The first group is the Western denominations brought to

development of SCCs emerges.⁴⁵ At its 6th Plenary Assembly from 20 November to 2 December, 1961 the Zaire Episcopal Conference (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo or DRC that is a neighbor to Eastern Africa) approved a pastoral plan to promote "Living Base Ecclesial Communities" (also called "Living Christian Communities").⁴⁶ *Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes de Base* (CEVB) is the full French term for SCCs. The bishops opted for these communities to be more important than the well-known mission structures (church buildings, schools, hospitals). These Living Base Ecclesial Communities were said to be the

Africa by the expatriate missionaries: Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, among others. The second group comprises what has been called the African Independent Churches or the African Initiated Churches. The third group are the Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian Churches. They are distinguished by the experience of the Holy Spirit as normative in church life and worship and belief in world evangelization. They maintain a strong sense of Africanness and are independent in their work, but they maximize their network connections with the global evangelical community. The word and importance of "Evangelical" cuts across all three groups. See Harvey Kwiyani, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014 especially the section "African Missions in History" (pp. 51-80).

⁴⁵ Irish SCCs animator and writer Father James O'Halloran, SDB makes the interesting observation: "I feel it was a pity that our [expatriate] missionaries did not go to Africa with a communitarian model of church in the first instance, because traditionally there was a great sense of family and community there even before we arrived. Indeed their strong sense of family and community is a special gift of the African groups to the rest of the world." *Living Cells: Vision and Practicalities of Small Christian Communities and Groups*, Dublin: Columba Press, 2010, p. 206. NOTE: In this Ebook the term "missionaries" will always be qualified with a descriptive adjective such as "expatriate missionary" and "African missionary."

⁴⁶ Actes de la VIe Assemblée Plénière de l'Épiscopat du Congo. Léopoldville 1961 [20 novembre — 2 décembre], Édition: Secrétariat Général de l'Épiscopat du Congo [Congo-Léopoldville 1961] 133).

only way to make the church more "African"⁴⁷ and close to the people.⁴⁸ Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Scripture Scholar Father André Kabasele Mukenge states that "a firm decision was made to align pastoral care by setting up vibrant Christian Communities."⁴⁹

⁴⁷ In a symposium in Germany in 2013 Democratic Republic of the Congo Sister José Ngalula, RSA stated that the Basic Christian Communities were a response to basic African intuitions and a desire to root Christianity in an African reality. She traced the origins of BCCs in Africa to the Congolese (now Democratic Republic of the Congo) Bishops Conference in Africa in 1961 and to the initiatives of Maryknoll missionaries in northwestern Tanzania starting in 1966. "History, Development and Statu Quo of Basic Christian Community (BCC) in Africa" in Moerschbacher, Marco (ed.), Proceedings of the International Symposium on In the World of Today? The Church on Her Way in Basic Christian Communities, Tübingen, Germany, 17-20 January, 2012, pp. 1-2, posted on the University of Tübingen Website at <http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/en/faculties/catholic-theology/lehrstuehle/religionspaedagogik/basisgemeinden-symposium/presentationen-der-vortraege.html> Also found on the Academia.edu Website, retrieved 20 August, 2014, https://www.academia.edu/6456909/HISTORY_DEVELOPMENT_AND_STATU_QUO_OF_BASIC_CHRISTIAN

At this same symposium Marco Moerschbacher made this striking observation: "Neither from the time of the Second Vatican Council nor from Latin America comes the oldest option of a local church for what is called today Christian Base Community (see HK, December 2012, 609 ff and March 2012, 128 ff.) The oldest is rather the option of the Congolese Episcopal Conference at its plenary meeting in 1961 -- historically between the independence (1960) of the former Belgian colony and the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962). The Brazilian church's pastoral plan with such an option dates back to 1962." "For Fifty Years on the Road: The Importance of the Base Communities in Africa's Local Churches," from the German Version in *Herder Korrespondenz*, 4/2013, pps. 200-204. Retrieved on 14 February, 2016, webmaster's own, not authorized translation. <http://www.con-spiration.de/texte/english/2013/moerschbacher-e.html>

⁴⁸The actual launching of SCCs in DRC goes back to the period 1971-1972 when there was a confrontation between President Mobutu Sese Seko and the Catholic Church. Mobutu's "authenticity" campaign suppressed the missionary institutes and associations. To meet the crisis the church established the priority of the creation and organization of SCCs. The pioneering and visionary Cardinal Joseph Malula of Kinshasa Archdiocese, DRC stated: "The Living Ecclesial Communities are slowly becoming the ordinary place of Christian life with the parish as the communion of the Living Ecclesial Communities." This included emphasizing lay ministries and implementing Vatican II's theology of laity, "the People of God." In his characteristic humor, Malula described his initiative as an effort to "bomb the existing parishes to make them explode in small communities." Quoted in Jean-Marc Éla, "Les Communautés de Base dans les Églises Africaines," in J. M. Éla and R. Luneau, *Voici le Temps des Héritiers: Églises d'Afrique et Voies Nouvelles*, Paris: Karthala, 1982, p. 161.

⁴⁹ André Kabasele Mukenge, "The Biblical Approach of Basic Ecclesial Communities: Aspects of Their Fundamental Principles" in Krämer, Klaus and Vellguth, Klaus (eds.), *Small Christian Communities: Fresh Stimulus*, p. 3.

The very first Small Christian Communities⁵⁰ in Africa started in the then Belgian Congo in the late 1950s (then called the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) at independence in 1960, then called Zaire from 1971 to 1997 and now called DRC again) and officially in 1961, the very year that AMECEA started.⁵¹

Then came the historic Second Vatican Council (1962-65).⁵² Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are not specifically mentioned in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, but are clearly implied. The traditional geographical parish is considered the basic juridical unit of the Catholic Church so there is no mention of Subparishes, Outstations/ Mission Chapels/Sub-stations and SCCs, that is, nothing “smaller” or “lower” than the parish. The same applies to the revised *1983 Code of Canon Law*. While SCCs are not specifically mentioned in the code, they are indirectly referred to in the section on “Structures” under the “People of God.” The Local Churches have the freedom to carry out pastoral work in parishes on the local level following their own structures and activities. This is described as the “ordering of the parish on the most local levels.”

One of these structures is SCCs. In the SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa (the nine AMECEA countries) the SCC is an official pastoral, ecclesial structure in the parish. The SCCs officially participate in the parish leadership structures. Each SCC (or a group of SCCs) has a representative on the Outstation/Mission Chapel, Subparish or Parish Pastoral Council. Elections start at the level of SCCs and move upwards. This insures that the Parish Pastoral Council leaders are chosen from those lay people who are already leaders in their SCCs – thus true representation from below.

Small Christian Communities developed as a result of putting the communion ecclesiology and teachings of Vatican II into practice.⁵³ Small Christian Communities make real the vision of Vatican II that calls on the Church to be (shine forth as) “a people made one with the unity (brought into unity) from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (No. 4 of *Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church of the Church*).

No. 9 says that we are even saved “not as individuals... but rather to make them into a people.” We are most whom we are when we gather as an assembly for prayer and worship.

⁵⁰ We continue to do research on the first recorded use of the name “Small Christian Community/ies” (SCCs) in English and “*Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo ya/za Kikristo*” (JNNK) in Swahili.

⁵¹ A good summary is found in the section “From African Dioceses to Small Christian Communities” in John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, Second Edition, 2009, pp. 389-392.

⁵² 11 October, 2012 was the 50th Anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council and a *Kairos* moment to deepen the vision, spirit and practice of the teachings of this historic council.

⁵³ Filipino laywoman Estela P. Padilla, the Pastoral Coordinator of Bukal ng Tipan – CICM, is presently carrying out very interesting research on “BECs in Africa, Latin America and Asia and their Reception of Vatican 2.”

Living this kind of Christian life reflects our deepest identity, that we are created in the image and likeness of God. This identity manifests itself in our deepest needs for love, happiness, community and family.

No. 17 refers to the Trinitarian understanding of the church as “the People of God,⁵⁴ the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁵

No. 26 states:

This Church of Christ is truly present in all legitimate local congregations of the faithful which, united with their pastors, are themselves called churches in the *New Testament*.⁵⁶ For in their locality these are the new People called by God, in the Holy Spirit and in much fullness... In these communities though frequently small and poor, or living far from one another, Christ is present. By virtue of Him the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church gathers together.

“Article 3: Forming a Christian Community” (Numbers 15-18 of the *Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church - Ad Gentes*) does not talk about SCCs as such, but mentions the importance of ecclesial communities, associations and groups connected to the lay apostolate.

No. 10 of the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Lay People* describes “Church Communities” including different types of ecclesial communities especially the parish.

⁵⁴ Meaning of the “People of God.” Found in the *Old Testament*’s emphasis on the Jewish People as the Chosen People of God (Yahweh). In the *New Testament I Peter: 2:9-10* says of the newly baptized Christians:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

There are two interpretations depending on the context: First, wider and inclusive: all human beings are part of the People of God (we are all children of God). Second, narrow and exclusive: members of the Catholic Church only.

⁵⁵ Vatican Website, retrieved 30 September, 2011, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641122_lumen-gentium_en.html

⁵⁶ Another translation of this sentence reads: “The Church of Christ is found in every group of the faithful in a given neighborhood or area who together with their pastors are also called the church in the writings of the *New Testament*.”

The spirit and content of the Second Vatican Council mirror what St. John XXIII described as “reading the signs of the times”⁵⁷ when he originally called the council. The *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (commonly known by the Latin title *Gaudium et Spes*) emphasized this explicit call: “The church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (No. 4).

For African SCCs this means reading the African signs of the times in the light of the Gospel and at the same time interpreting the Gospel in the light of the African signs of the times. This is an approach to doing theology that American theologian Father David Tracy describes as “mutually critical correlation.”⁵⁸

Massimo Faggioli points out how in the 2021--2024 Synod and the Synodal Process is bringing something new both theologically and institutionally:

It is expressive of the global dimension of the Catholic Church with all its diversity and contrasts—the real challenge of the twenty-first century. Though bishops and superiors of religious orders were represented [at earlier synods], so were other members of the church; thus, global Catholicism supplemented the papal primacy of the nineteenth century [Vatican I] and episcopal collegiality of the twentieth [Vatican II] with Ecclesial Synodality. Instead of using the method of *disputatio*, it adopted “spiritual conversation” as a way to grasp the *consensus fidelium*.

It’s also expressive of a concept of synodality that differs from earlier phases (especially in the post-1985 *Communio Ecclesiology*), when synodality was seen as a dimension of the life of Local Churches and the relations among them... This is no longer the synod of bishops but rather a synod with bishops.⁵⁹

In giving enthusiastic support to Base Ecclesial Communities Honduran Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga, SDB,⁶⁰ Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras describes them as

⁵⁷ St. Paul VI describe the importance of being constantly aware of the changes in society in this striking image: “You must continually stand at the window, open to the world. You are obliged to study the facts, the events, the opinions, the current interests and the thought of the surrounding environment.”

⁵⁸ “Theological Interpretation of the Bible Today” in David Tracy, *A Short History of the Theological Interpretation of the Bible Today*, Fortress Press, 1984.

⁵⁹ Massimo Faggioli, “The Synodal Journey Continues: But Course Corrections Are Needed,” *Commonweal Magazine*, 8 November, 2023, retrieved from the online version, 19 November, 2023, [The Synodal Journey Continues | Commonweal Magazine](#)

⁶⁰ It is interesting that Rodriguez Maradiaga was appointed to be the coordinator of a group of nine cardinals (Council of Nine) worldwide established by Pope Francis to advise him and to study a plan for revising the *Apostolic Constitution* on the Roman Curia.

“the great fruit of Vatican II.”⁶¹ The Kenyan book of prayers and songs, *Tumshangilie Bwana*, has this interesting description: “Small Christian Communities are one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council and an awakening of the church as the ‘Nation of God.’” A good explanation is found in “Vatican II’s Impact on Small Christian Communities,” in Chapter One in *Communities for the Kingdom: A Handbook for Small Christian Community Leaders* by Irish missionary and theologian Father Kieran Flynn, SPS.

Although the term SCCs is not mentioned specifically in the documents of Vatican II, some of the great theologians of the council emphasized them in their writings in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The French Dominican theologian Father Yves Congar, OP in *Lay People in the Church* wrote that SCCs are “little church cells wherein the mystery is lived directly and with great simplicity...“the church’s machinery, sometimes the very institution, is a barrier obscuring her deep and living mystery, which they can find, or find again, only from below.”⁶²

The German Jesuit theologian Father Karl Rahner, SJ in the chapter on “Church from the Roots” in *The Shape of the Church to Come* wrote: “The church in the future will be one built from below by basic communities as a result of free initiative and association. We should make every effort not to hold up this development, but to promote it and direct it on the right lines.”⁶³

The founding fathers of AMECEA had a vision of implementing Vatican II’s ecclesiology of communion in Eastern Africa that focused on the communion (*koinonia*) and service (*diakonia*) aspects. Tanzanian Scripture scholar Father Titus Amigu states: “After the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) doors were opened and the Spirit of God brought a new Pentecost with the introduction of Small Christian Communities in Africa.”⁶⁴ Tanzanian theologian Father Nicholas Segeja states: AMECEA started laying emphasis “on developing SCCs as a concrete expression of, and realization of, the Church as Family Model of Church which reflects the ecclesiology of communion of Vatican II.”⁶⁵ In reflecting on the reception of Vatican II in Africa, Nigerian theologian Father Emmanuel Orobator, SJ comments:

⁶¹ In August, 2007 the Social Commission of the Brazilian Bishops Conference stated: “We wish to reaffirm decisively and give new impetus to the life and prophetic and sanctifying mission of the CEBs ... They have been one of the great manifestations of the Spirit in the Latin American and Caribbean Church since Vatican II.” “Base Communities ‘Edited Out,’” *Tablet*, 15 September, 2007, p. 34.

⁶² Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, First published in 1953, (London: Geoffrey Chapman Revised Edition, 1985), p. 341.

⁶³ Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

⁶⁴ Titus Amigu, “Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo Small Christian Communities in Tanzania,” *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 86/87, 2006, http://www.c-b-f.org/documents/Gemeinschaften_e.pdf

⁶⁵ Nicholas Segeja, “Summary Notes” on *The Development and Ecclesiology of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in AMECEA Countries*, Nairobi: Unpublished Course Notes at CUEA, 2010, p. 4.

AMECEA has developed an admirable profile in the African Church in the area of regional ecclesiastical collaboration. Arguably, the most concrete and best achievement of AMECEA is its pioneering role in developing Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as a new way of being church.⁶⁶

As a personal witness to visioning the Church as the People of God, American Maryknoll missionary priest Father Michael Snyder, MM states: “Throughout my years in pastoral work in Tanzania, parish leaders were always selected from the Small Christian Communities. SCCs were the core of parish life in the dioceses where we served. Vatican II has been extremely formative in shaping our generation’s pastoral approaches to mission.”⁶⁷

Latin America,⁶⁸ Africa and Asia (especially the Philippines⁶⁹) all pioneered the

⁶⁶ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, “After All, Africa is Largely a Non-literate Continent: The Reception of Vatican II in Africa,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013), p. 299.

⁶⁷ Michael Snyder in an email message to the author dated 25 June, 2013.

⁶⁸ It is generally agreed that this SCC/BCC/BEC/CEB Model of Church started with the CEBs* in Barra do Pirai Diocese, Brazil in 1956. The language was Portuguese. Salesian missionary priest Father Jim O’Halloran states: “Leonardo Boff traces their beginning to the lament of a humble old lady [called the ‘Rosa Parks of CEBs’] so her words may be among the most momentous uttered in church history. ‘Christmas Eve,’ she complained, ‘all three Protestant Churches were lit up and full of people...and the Catholic Church closed and dark!...Because we can’t get a priest.’ The question naturally arose why everything should come to a standstill simply because there was no priest. This led to an initiative by Brazilian Bishop Agnelo Rossi, Bishop of Barra do Pirai Diocese in the Metropolitan of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil to launch a community catechetical/evangelization movement in Barra do Parai out of which small communities [CEBs] eventually emerged.” (Jim O’Halloran, *Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Companion*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996. p. 18). See also Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiology: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*. Maryknoll, N. Y. Orbis Books, 1986, p. 3.

Rossi trained lay catechists as coordinators of these local small communities (CEBs). On Sundays the catechists led a liturgical service similar to the mass that was being celebrated by the Catholic priest pastor in the distant Mother Church in the parish. As American Holy Cross theologian Father Robert Pelton explains these liturgies were the forerunner of the “Sunday Services Without a Priest.” Robert S. Pelton, CSC, *From Power to Communion: Toward a New Way of Being Church Based on the Latin American Experience*, Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994, p. 64.

*The terminology is complex:

Portuguese-speaking Brazil: Comunidades Eclesiais de Base (CEBs).
 Portuguese-speaking Africa: Pequenas Comunidades Cristãs (PCCs).
 Spanish: Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (CEBs).
 English: Base or Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs).

⁶⁹ Basic Ecclesial Communities started in Mindanao in the Philippines in 1967 and 1968.

development of a SCC/BCC/BEC/CEB Model of Church. After considerable research and debate, many specialists feel that quite independently of one another these three areas of the Catholic Church in the Global South⁷⁰ *simultaneously* experienced the extraordinary growth

BECs started with the social justice advocacy ministry of Maryknoll priests including Ed Gerlock in connection with the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) that is one of the largest organizations of rural workers in the Philippines --a socio-political movement run by peasants and for peasants. Conversation with American Maryknoll Missionary Father Jerry Burr, MM, 6 August, 2013.

Officially their beginning was the first Mindanao-Sulu Pastoral Conference in 1971. Filipino Bishop Francisco Claver, SJ states:

We in Mindanao-Sulu woke up one day and realized what we had been doing in the dioceses of the region all along since 1971 was actually what Latin Americans were calling *Comunidades de Base* – small basic (Christian) communities, In fact we also realized that any church community that tried making itself into a dialogic, participative and co-responsible community [traits that characterize an authentic Vatican II Church] was quite automatically forming itself into a Basic Ecclesial Community.

Francisco Claver, *Making of a Local Church*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008, p. 88.

⁷⁰ The nations of Africa, Central and Latin America, and most of Asia are collectively known as the “Global South” and include 157 recognized states in the world. This term is preferred to the terms “developing countries,” “developing world,” “least developed countries,” “less advanced countries” emerging countries,” and the “Third World” that are condescending, pejorative, offensive and a stereotype and are usually used in a narrow economic sense. Interestingly the first reference I saw to “the Christian Churches in the Global South” in 2003 was not in a religious journal or magazine but in a “secular” literary magazine – *The New Yorker*. Related negative terms are: “economically developing countries;” “economically emerging countries;” “economically developing south;” and “economically underprivileged countries.” The newer language is: “Global South countries” (geographical rather than economic); and “Southern Hemisphere” (geographical belt across Latin America, Africa and parts of Asia). Also the terms that are becoming more common are: “high-income countries,” “middle-income countries,” and “low-income countries.”

Equally “Global North” is being increasingly used to describe the economically wealthier countries of the Northern Hemisphere especially Europe and North America. **NOTE:** “The Third World is a label originated as a way to [categorize countries](#) that didn’t align with Western countries or the former Soviet bloc. It’s now often used to describe poor countries, or developing countries, and by extension, mostly nonwhite majority countries.” Charles Blow, “Tucker Carlson and White Replacement,” *New York Times*, 12 April 2021, p. A18. Retrieved in the online version, 12 April, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/11/opinion/tucker-carlson-white-replacement.html>

We also try to avoid other stereotype and pejorative descriptions of Africa as the “dark continent,” “the lost continent” and the “forgotten continent.”

of SCCs.⁷¹ Small Christian Communities are a global phenomenon. They have developed on every continent. Scottish minister Ian Fraser has observed that “Small Christian Communities are the result of the spontaneous combustion of the Holy Spirit all over the world.” Thus the emergence of SCCs is basically a development that is indigenous to different continents and countries at the same chronological time. However much familial relationship they may have, developments on the different continents and countries each display their own point of departure, given the respective socio-cultural and ecclesiastical contexts/situations on each continent and country.

Thus, contrary to some misinformed interpretations, the African experience did not come from Latin America, but developed on its own.⁷² African SCCs developed mainly as a pastoral, parish-based model of church. O’Halloran confirms this by saying:

During the 1971 [World] Synod of Bishops⁷³ the Africans present noted that Small Christian Communities already existed in Africa. And this quite independently of what had happened in Latin America. One cannot say for certain where the modern groups [SCCs] began. They sprang up spontaneously throughout the world at roughly the same historical period by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁴

Orobator explains:

⁷¹ Confirmed in “Spread of SCCs across Continents,” Small Christian Communities in Mumbai Website, retrieved on 23 July, 2014, <http://www.mumbaiscc.in/spreadofscs.php> and “Development of SCCs in Different Regions of the World,” Small Christian Communities in India Website, retrieved on 23 July, 2014, <http://www.sccind.org/home/inner/22>

⁷² Archbishop Jean-Marie Speich, the Apostolic Nuncio in Ghana, has an original interpretation. He says that the reality of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is an African invention and not a South American concept clarifying that the practice of gathering Christian believers in communities started when the first missionaries in Africa initiated contacts with local communities through catechists. “The Small Christian communities are not a South American invention as many believe that it is. Small Christian communities started in Africa 150 years ago with the arrival of the first missionaries and with the contacts of the local African catechists who were great witnesses” who experienced much suffering, some having suffered martyrdom.” Catholic News Agency for Africa (CANAA), 27 November, 2014.

⁷³ In the [Roman Catholic Church](#), the Synod of Bishops is an advisory body for the [Pope](#). It is described in the [Code of Canon Law](#) (CIC) as “a group of bishops who have been chosen from different regions of the world and meet together at fixed times to foster closer unity between the Roman Pontiff and bishops, to assist the Roman Pontiff with their counsel in the preservation and growth of faith and morals and in the observance and strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline, and to consider questions pertaining to the activity of the Church in the world” (Canon 342 of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*). In terms of the official reports and overall documentation of the various synods, it is said that “those who control the process control the content.”

⁷⁴ James O’Halloran, *Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Companion*, p. 23.

Small Christian Communities are present in various forms in different parts of the world, but they gained a distinctive ecclesiological notoriety in Latin America. In this wider context the specificity or uniqueness of SCCs in Africa does not appear obvious. In some instances they have been compared to and confused with the Latin American model of *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base*. The similarities between both models of SCCs are noticeable, but the distinctions are clear. The same can be said of the historical trajectory of the two models. On the evidence of history, they are contemporaries, albeit they developed on opposite ends of the globe. Their emergence is coterminous, such that ‘it would be hard to establish clearly whether one was prior to the other in logic or historical development’ [American theologian Father Roger Haight, SJ].⁷⁵

German Divine Word missiologist Father Paul Steffen, SVD adds:

Small Christian Communities were increasingly seen as an African way to contextualize the *communio ecclesiology* of Vatican II. The SCCs are in line with the nature of Africans and are often the only way to combat the negative aspects of globalization, which means in practice to build Christian communities which support their members in their concrete or real life situations as extended families. The reality allows us to speak of a process of building Small Christian Communities in Africa which develop according to the traditions and customs of the culture of Africa and that, unlike Latin America, do not originate in a society of socio-political conflicts that often have influenced the movement of the Latin American Basic Ecclesial Communities. The SCC movement also expresses a reawakening of African traditions and a strengthening of the African identity as being authentically African and Christian.⁷⁶

There are other historical misconceptions: First, that Eastern Africa SCCs are a cell model of church with communistic and socialistic overtones. This has resulted in unfounded fears of control, uniformity and politicizing. In the 1960s and 1970s expatriate missionaries from European countries such as Poland came to Eastern Africa. At first they were against SCCs because of their negative experience of the cells in the communist world in Europe. Gradually they understood that the Pastoral Model of the AMECEA Region was very different and became supportive.

⁷⁵ Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, “Small Christian Communities as a New Way of Becoming Church: Practice, Progress and Prospects,” in Krämer, Klaus and Vellguth, Klaus (eds.), *Small Christian Communities: Fresh Stimulus for a Forward-looking Church*, Volume 2, “Theology of One World” series of Mission Aachen, Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2013, p. 115.

⁷⁶ Paul Steffen, *Centres of Formation and Evangelizing Ministry: Pastoral Institutes in Oceania and Africa*, Studia Instituti Missiologici Societatis Verbi Divini Nr. 102, Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag, 2014, p. 99.

Second, that SCCs are a parallel church along the lines of the independent Christian (especially Evangelical and Pentecostal) sects. As a clear pastoral, parish-based model, the experience of Small Christian Communities in the AMECEA Region is very Catholic and within the ecclesial structures and guidelines. That the SCCs are closely linked to the parish and focus on pastoral priorities avoids the pitfalls of other parts of the world.⁷⁷

Although St. Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Letter *Africae Terrarum* in 1967 does not specifically refer to SCCs, it contains these statements:

No. 1: "The fervor and vitality of the new Christian Communities, in particular, showed us clearly that Africa is opening itself to the Kingdom of God."⁷⁸

No. 12: "As regards community life – which in African tradition was family life – we note that participation in the life of the community, whether in the circle of one's kinsfolk or in public life, is considered a precious duty and the right of all."

Democratic Republic of the Congo Sister Josée Ngalula, RSA points out that these strong magisterial affirmations continued in St. Pope Paul VI's speech to the representatives of African Episcopal Conferences in Kampala, Uganda in 1969. "With two of his sentences, he gave a strong cry:

You, Africans, you are henceforth your own missionaries (...) To be your own missionaries means that you, Africans, you must continue to build up the Church on this continent.

An adaptation of Christian life in the pastoral, liturgical, catechetical and spiritual field is not only possible, but is encouraged by the Church (...) you can [may] and you must have an African Christianity.

These two strong affirmations were an important "pacemaker" for many African bishops. It is thus not amazing to see some bishops, from 1970 onwards, realize creative pastoral initiatives.⁷⁹ Paul VI's challenges pave the way for the Local Church⁸⁰ in Africa to develop its own local pastoral structures such as SCCs.

⁷⁷ Based on a conversation with Zambian Archbishop Thesphore George, the Archbishop of Lusaka, Zambia in Lusaka on 30 November, 2013.

⁷⁸ We say that "the Kingdom is God is here, but not yet" meaning that on earth we experience the kingdom partially (such as in the Sacrament of the Eucharist), but in heaven we will experience the fullness of the kingdom. In his doctorate dissertation Tanzanian priest and theologian Father Wilbert Gobbo says: "In the Social Trinitarian Model, SCCs are like a 'foretaste' (prolepsis) of the Kingdom of God."

⁷⁹ Ngalula in Moerschbacher, *Proceedings of the International Symposium*, p. 2.

⁸⁰ The terms "Local Church" and "local priests" are used in this Ebook. The terms "Indigenous Church" and "indigenous priests" are frequently used. These terms have a

Although 1973 and 1976 are considered the official starting points for SCCs in the AMECEA countries, the seeds were sown earlier. Our research on the history of SCCs in Eastern Africa uses the metaphor⁸¹ of a trickle of water that grows into a small stream that grows into a narrow river that is fed by many tributaries and slowly grows into a mighty river that became an AMECEA SCCs Key Pastoral Priority. The tributaries are identified as articles, booklets, books, bulletins, conversations, conferences, discussions, DVDs, grassroots experiences, interviews, leaflets, sheets, cards, local experiments, meetings, minutes, newsletters, plans, printed handouts, radio programs, reports, research, seminars, sound-slide shows, speeches, synods, talks, TV programs, videos and workshops coming from the different AMECEA countries.

The very beginning of SCCs in Eastern Africa⁸² (and the whole of English-speaking Africa) can be traced back to the joint pastoral and missionary efforts of the American

generally positive meaning in Africa although they have a more critical and negative meaning in the West such as “those indigenous churches.”

⁸¹ This metaphor can be compared to the historical and scientific search for the source of the Nile River that is a major north-flowing river in northeastern Africa and is commonly regarded as the longest river in the world. The Nile River has two major tributaries, the White Nile and Blue Nile. The White Nile is considered to be the headwaters and primary stream of the Nile itself. The Blue Nile, however, is the source of most of the water and silt. The White Nile is longer and rises in the Great Lakes region of central Africa, with the most distant source still undetermined but located in Rwanda – probably a small trickle of water leading into a small stream that finally empties into the very large Lake Victoria.

⁸² This early history of SCCs in Tanzania was enriched by the author’s discussions with Tanzanian bishop and Church Historian Bishop Method Kilaini in Mwanza, Tanzania on 20-23 May, 2014. See Kilaini, Method, “Small Christian Communities: Sharing the Tanzania Pastoral Experience,” Mwanza: Printed Paper, 2014. 7 pages. The Swahili version of this paper is *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo za Kikristo (JNNK): Uzoefu wa Kichungaji wa Tanzania*. http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/small_christian.pdf

The historical significance of the Lake Victoria Zone in northwestern Tanzania was emphasized in our discussions. It now comprises eight dioceses (Mwanza Archdiocese and the dioceses of Bukoba, Bunda, Geita, Kayanga, Musoma, Rulenge-Ngara and Shinyanga): The first African Cardinal, Laurean Rugambwa, came from Bukoba. The first Tanzanian President, Servant of God Julius K. Nyerere, came from Musoma. The pioneering Dutch Bishop Joseph Blomjous, MAfr, a visionary of the founding of AMECEA and an important voice at the Second Vatican Council, was the bishop of Mwanza. The founder of SCCs in Tanzania, Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, came from Bukoba and was the bishop of Rulenge-Ngara. The leading East African Catholic theologian Laurenti Magesa who wrote a lot on the theology of SCCs comes from Musoma.

Maryknoll missionaries⁸³ in three rural parishes in the Luo-speaking Deanery (Nyarombo,⁸⁴ Ingri and Kowak Parishes⁸⁵) in North Mara in Musoma Diocese in northwestern Tanzania in 1966.

This new type of evangelization and pastoral activity began with research on the social structures and community values of the African Initiated Churches (AICs)⁸⁶ especially the Legio Maria⁸⁷ (Latin for “Legion of Mary”), a break-away church among the Luo Ethnic Group, carried out by a French cultural anthropologist laywoman Marie-France Perrin Jassy in 1966.⁸⁸ She observed that for the Catholic Church to be successful in evangelizing the Luo

⁸³ Based on conversations with many Maryknollers over the years including Fathers Frank Breen, George Cotter, Ed Hayes, Mike Kirwen, John Lange, Dan Ohmann, John Sivalon, Dave Smith, Don Sybertz, Mike Snyder and Tom Tiscornia; Brothers Kevin Dargan and Francis TenHoopen; Sisters Katie Erisman, Nonie Gutzler, Janice McLaughlin and Janice Srebalus.

A good summary is Frank Breen, “Excursus: Small Christian Communities,” *Maryknoll History in Africa*, Volume Three (Musoma Diocese – 1961 to 2015), Maryknoll, NY: Privately Printed, 2016, pp. 237-241.

⁸⁴ See Frank Breen, “Nyarombo, Our Lady of Grace Parish,” *Maryknoll History in Africa*, Volume Three (Musoma Diocese – 1961 to 2015), Maryknoll, NY: Privately Printed, 2016, pp. 229-237.

⁸⁵ Laurenti Mageza suggested to the author that a complete history of the origin of SCCs in these parishes should be written up as part of this important historical record. During a visit to North Mara on 8 July, 2014 I interviewed Tanzanian layman Francis Anthony Otieno, the retired catechist of Utegi Parish (originally founded in 1960 as an out-station of Kowak Parish that was founded in 1933). Francis was born in 1948. He has a remarkable memory of these historical events. His father Anthony was also a catechist. Francis knew Father Francis Murray, MM who was the Pastor of Kowak Parish in the 1960s and many Maryknollers who served in North Mara. He recalled that during this 1960s period the Maryknoll Sisters met with small neighborhood groups of Luos to pray the rosary and other prayers.

⁸⁶ Also called African Instituted Churches, African Independent Churches and African Indigenous Churches.

⁸⁷ “A Spirit Initiated Church (SIC) or new religious movement initially among the Luo people of western Kenya. By the early 1960s the movement had assembled a good number of catechists, acolytes, and believers in a spiritual return of Jesus Christ. The continuous expansion of this movement coupled with its belief in Simeo Ondetto as the returned Son of God led to theological tension, and eventual break with the lay Catholic movement, the Legion of Mary. This is the only example of an African Independent Church that broke away from the [Roman] Catholic Church. Legio Maria was legally registered in Kenya in 1966 as a church, expanded massively in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and eventually spread to many countries in Africa, including Uganda, Tanzania, Congo, Zaire (DRC), Rwanda, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Nigeria. Based in entry for Legio Maria on the Wikipedia Website retrieved on 12 July, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legio_Maria

people it had to enter into and interact with the Luo peoples' style of basic community life. The Luos are not tribal with a hereditary chief but are ethnic groups that are democratic politically. This facilitated the spread of SCCs once the elders as a group agreed.

It was clear that the Catholic priest could not visit everywhere in Luoland to provide the pastoral care and do missionary outreach. Also the priest did not want everything to wait until he came to a local village and local Christian community. So it was important for the local Catholic Luo communities to have their own regular small community identity where they could be more independent and self-sufficient in praying, reading the *Bible* and social activities. The first terms used were *chama* (Swahili for "small group" or "society"). The plural is *vyama*) and "small communities of Christians" (forerunner of SCCs).⁸⁹ This was the SCC Model of Church from below, from the grassroots.

Maryknoll missionary priest Michael Kirwen explains:

Jassy had an exceptional Luo woman field assistant named Cecilia Kamba from Shirati who was a school teacher in Musoma. She was able to get into the small churches and talk with the elders in a way that was unusual for a woman. She translated everything for Marie who did not know or speak Luo. At that time Marie lived at Masonga. This informant was key to Marie's depth research on SCCs.⁹⁰

In a *Mission Diary* American priest Dan Zwack, the pastor of Nyarombo Parish (who eventually left Africa and Maryknoll) reported that in July, 1966, Marie France presented her initial report to the Luo Deanery, although her research was not yet complete. Zwack became very excited about her findings and had her move to Nyarombo Parish, where Marie France continued to visit the meetings of the *chamas* that were being started at that time.

Zwack gave a long account of these activities and how he responded in a diary written in March, 1967. Here are some excerpts from this diary:

Marie-France was invited to do a study within the Luo Deanery, a group of five adjacent parishes, of the various African separatist churches in the area with special reference to the Legion of Mary even though they were few in the area of research. She set about making a statistical survey of all the

⁸⁸ A five-page typed history of Perrin Jassy's stay and research in Tanzania is found in Daniel Zwack, *Nyarombo Mission Diary*, 27 March 1967. Joseph Carney documents her research and findings in *The History of the Functional Structure of the Maryknoll Mission in Musoma and Shinyanga, Tanzania*, New York: St John's University Unpublished Dissertation, 1973.

⁸⁹ See Marie-France Perrin Jassy, *Forming Christian Communities*, Kampala: *Gaba Pastoral Paper* No. 12, 1970 and *Basic Communities in the African Churches*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973. Perrin Jassy's work is also found in: Marie-France Perrin Jassy, *La Communauté dans les Églises Africaines*, Bandundu, Kinshasa: Centre D'Etudes Ethologiques, 1970; Marie-France Perrin Jassy, "Face au changement: Former des communautés de Base," *Ceeba* I, vol. 8, 1981; and Marie-France Perrin-Jassy, "La communauté de base dans les Églises Africaines," *Ceeba*, series II, vol. 3, 1970, wherein she specifically discusses Maryknoll.

⁹⁰ Michael Kirwen, email message to the author, 6 June, 2024.

Pentecostal sects she could contact, which came to twelve. She tabulated and compared their origins, structures, worship, social activities and peculiarities, their impact upon members and outsiders, the types which adhere to such groups, and the staying power of the societies and members.

We [Maryknoller missionaries] had discussed and tried many ways to create communities amongst our people, but found no real success. We thought only along European models and categories, and these don't work here. Our sociologist showed us the patterns of Luo community life that she had discovered and how the indigenous African churches invariably were coming up with new pastoral solutions based on these patterns. Why shouldn't we learn from these churches what African religious community means and encourage our people to do the same?

The sects put great stock in extemporaneous prayer at public and private worship, and in prayers for the sick or for disturbed persons whom they consider possessed by devils. For several years I had been trying, with indifferent success, to help our catechumens with such prayer, but at least the catechists were familiarized with it. So, we had been preparing the ground for such plantation. I had also been trying to introduce native forms of singing, with little success, but at least the catechists knew I was trying. And I was trying to impress on the catechumens that the only law of their new religion is love.

In July of 1966 I put the whole thing plainly before two groups of catechumens, to form communities of prayer and mutual help, with their own leaders and activities. I played recordings of songs from the sects, which delighted the catechumens, who sang along with them, swaying back and forth. We also had the sick sit on chairs in the middle of the group, for whom several people would pray extemporaneously. Then all of us would lay our hands on each sick person's head. Then the sick person would be lifted up while we prayed something like: "May the Lord Jesus Christ restore you to health and peace."

Later some Christians told me that they had secretly been praying for the sick and only now learned that it was approved Christian practice!!

Each group chose six leaders, three men and three women, to whom I read passages from the gospels about the Christian idea of leadership as humble service. They adopted the rite of washing the feet of members as a regular feature of their meetings. The catechists helped but it was all so congenial to their mentality that they easily fell in with it. The groups engaged in activities, such as helping someone whose garden [farm] got behind, cutting grass for a thatched roof, or building a hut for another.⁹¹

Zwack gave a update nine months later called "The Communities Parish" in the January, 1968 *Nyarombo Mission Diary*:

⁹¹ Daniel Zwack, *Nyarombo Mission Diary*, Nyarombo, Tanzania: Privately Printed, 27 March, 1967.

I sent a diary telling of our work in founding neighborhood communities among our Christians. Now almost a year later one can say that the work progresses on all fronts. If one were to characterize this work it would be “personalist” – an outlook that puts the greatest value on the person, in himself or herself, and his or her relationship with everyone else.

This is summarized by Maryknoll missionary priest Father Frank Breen, MM as follows:

In the late 1960s, beginning in the North Mara section of Musoma Diocese, Maryknollers initiated the community-based ecclesial model that become known as Small Christian Communities. This model has now spread to all countries of Sub-Saharan Africa and is the pillar of the pastoral structure of the Catholic Church, especially in urban areas.⁹²

In his African Church History under the section "Small Christian Communities - the Basis of the Local Church in Africa" John Baur states:

The origin of the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is sometimes wrongly attributed to the Latin American model only and their value solely judged according to their involvement in the fight for social justice. There was also an inspiring model of the small communities of the independent African churches as documented by the East African study of [Marie-France] Perrin-Jassy, commissioned by the Maryknoll missionaries.⁹³

English diocesan priest Father Gerry Proctor points out that this “Catholic experience of SCCs was an African response to an African problem. It was not copying from another continent of a model of Catholic Church that might or might not prove pastorally useful here.”⁹⁴

The Maryknoll missionaries focused on the formation of small natural communities that were neighborhood groups of Luo-speaking people in the rural areas. By 1968 Nyarombo Parish had 28 small communities,⁹⁵ Ingri Parish had 22 small communities and Kowak

⁹² Frank Breen, “Maryknoll in Africa,” *Interchange*, Volume 37, Number 2 (2017), page 10.

⁹³ John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994, p. 459. See also Joseph Healey, “Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and the New Way of Being Maryknoll in Africa.” Maryknoll Society of Fathers and Brothers Africa Regional Assembly, Arusha, Tanzania. May, 1999. Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 3 pages. Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers Africa Region Website, retrieved 27 February, 2015, <http://www.maryknollafrica.org/ComHealeyDocs4.htm>

⁹⁴ Gerry Proctor, *A Commitment to Neighborhood: Base Ecclesial Communities in Global Perspective*, Liverpool: Unpublished MPhil Dissertation, 2012, p. 70.

⁹⁵ See Daniel Zwack, *Nyarombo Mission Diary*, January, 1968.

Parish had 25 small communities. As many as 80% of the local Catholics participated.⁹⁶ American historian Joseph Carney reports:

The uniqueness of such a group was that it was not another church organization, the Legion of Mary, a sodality, etc. but rather it was the center of the community life based on geographical, material and social units and it was the growing center of the Christian life.⁹⁷

Carney adds:

The hinge point of the success of its group was the quality of the leadership. The focal point of a [Small] Christian Community was the sense of service of its leaders based on the gospel of Jesus. Perrin-Jassy, the Luo Deanery and head catechists thought it was important that the community leaders not be catechists. Rather the community had to elect at least six men or women as their community leaders...The catechist was on the other hand was to be the teacher and resource person.⁹⁸

Magesa confirms this history from his personal experience:

American Maryknoll Bishop John Rudin, MM [of Musoma Diocese] was in his own way an exceptionally simple, humble, pastorally-minded person who encouraged pastoral initiatives. The idea of building Small Christian Communities (SCCs), which was officially sanctioned and endorsed in 1976 as the church's "pastoral priority" by all the bishops of the region (the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa, AMECEA), was born and nurtured in the 1960s in the Diocese of Musoma at Nyarombo Parish under Bishop Rudin's leadership and with his blessing. I was privileged to serve in that parish and to witness the roots of the initiative in the years 1974 and 1975.⁹⁹

This is documented in *The Buffaloes: A Story Commemorating Maryknoll Society's 50 Years in Tanzania, 1946-1996*:

Frank (Ace) Murray was one of the most creative and innovative Maryknollers in East Africa. He was assigned to the then Africa Region in 1948 and worked in Tanzania until he left the region in 1972 and later Maryknoll in 1974. First Frank worked among the Luo in North Mara. He

⁹⁶ Some of this explanation is based on a conversation of Michael Kirwen, MM with the author in Nairobi on 30 April, 2014.

⁹⁷ Joseph Carney, *The History of the Functional Structure*, pps. 232-233.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

⁹⁹ Laurenti Magesa, "Endless Quest: The Vocation of an African Christian Theologian" in Jesse Mugambi and Evaristi Magoti (ed.), *Endless Quest: The Vocation of an African Christian Theologian*, a *Festschrift* for Professor Laurenti Magesa, Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2014, p. 15.

assisted a French sociologist, Marie-France Perrin Jassy, in a study of the Luo African Independent Churches in North Mara and their style of basic community life. Although 1973 and 1976 are considered the official starting points for Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the AMECEA countries, the very beginning of SCCs can be traced back to Nyarombo Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania in 1966 with this research on the social structures and community values of the Luo Ethnic Group.

Moreover, Small Christian Communities became the model of church in parts of the dioceses where Maryknoll worked several years before this approach to building the church was officially adopted by AMECEA churches. The famous Luo Deanery, home to several of our more famous [human] "buffaloes" was instrumental in promoting this ecclesiological thinking and practice.¹⁰⁰

Jassy's research led to several pastoral innovations. The "Sunday Service Without a Priest" led by the catechist¹⁰¹ was a meeting place and sign of unity for the members of these small neighborhood communities. The local leaders composed newly written hymns based on Luo rhythms, some related to community and unity. After the homily in the Sunday Mass the priest would lead a short "Health and Healing Service" for the sick in the community. This responded to the felt needs of the Luo people for more prayers for healing.

American Maryknoll Sister Catherine Erisman, MM adds:

A priority of the church at this time was building Small Christian Communities, called *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo* or *JNN* in Swahili. Two Maryknoll Fathers, Dan Zwack and Jerry Pavis, had built up these communities in Nyarombo Parish and [Maryknoll] Sisters Barbara Lambert and Barbara Nowak were in ministry there from 1969 to 1971 as integral members of the parish team. The Luo tribe lived in Nyarombo and the Christians had splintered off into many churches. These splinter groups were very popular, as they blended aspects of Christianity with their animist background.

Kirwen points out:

The use of the word "animist" shows how little was known about the vibrant salvific religion of the Luo people that brought about healing and wisdom, namely how do we come to exist, what is the reason for suffering and what is the meaning of death, long before the arrival of the missionaries who tried to foster on the people a Westernized religion taught as a Christian

¹⁰⁰ *The Buffaloes: A Story Society's 50 years in Tanzania, 1946-1996*, Dar es Salaam, privately *Commemorating Maryknoll* printed, 1996, 10, 54. 55.

¹⁰¹ Catechist is a very important lay ministry in Africa and includes many pastoral roles and responsibilities. In the USA catechist usually refers to a person who teaches religious education.

religion that was seen unreflectively or unknowingly as far superior to the existing Luo religion.¹⁰²

The Nyarombo Parish made strong efforts to assimilate church and culture with 28 active Small Christian Community groups in the parish. The sisters helped the catechists prepare liturgies. From the sisters the women learned health care and domestic arts...Maryknoll Sister Barbara Lambert, MM later wrote of her remembrance of Nyarombo: “It seems that Nyarombo was meant to be a Camelot – a dream that happened for a short time – one shining example of how beautiful and happy pastoral work can be.”¹⁰³

Kirwen uses the symbol of a tire to describe this new SCC pastoral approach from the grassroots up.¹⁰⁴ In the traditional Hub Model the center of pastoral life is the physical parish center with the priest in charge assisted by the catechist. This is the top-down model. At this time other Maryknoll priests in Musoma Diocese stayed with this traditional model.

In the new model called the Spokes Model the People of God (the lay people) in the outstations and in the SCCs take more leadership. This is the bottom-up model. The local Council of Elders is responsible for the catechists, not the priest. There are 10 ministries (Apostolic Offices) in the SCCs on the local level like care of babies,

¹⁰² Michael Kirwen, email message to the author, 6 June, 2024.

¹⁰³ Erisman, Catherine, *Maryknoll Sisters Tanzania 60 Years*. Maryknoll, NY: Privately Printed, 2015, 47-48.

¹⁰⁴ It is significant that as this new pastoral approach was going on in Musoma Diocese in northwestern Tanzania, a similar pastoral experiment from the grassroots up was going on in Lilongwe Archdiocese in Malawi. See:

Patrick Kalilombe, *From Outstations to Small Christian Communities: A Comparison of Two Pastoral Methods in Lilongwe Diocese*, Doctorate Dissertation, Berkeley: University of California, 1983.

Patrick Kalilombe, *From Outstations to Small Christian Communities*. Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, *Spearhead* 82-83, June-October, 1984. Reissued as Bishop Patrick Augustine Kalilombe, *From Outstation to Small Christian Communities: A Comparison Between Two Pastoral Methods in Lilongwe Diocese (1902-1975)*, edited by Gerard Chigona, Balaka: Montfort Media, 2016.

The editor states the importance of getting this original and unprecedented work of research published and available to the Catholic Church in Malawi and to all people interested in understanding Kalilombe’s thought. This helps us understand the vision and practice of one of the founders of SCCs in Eastern Africa. Two Pastoral Systems are compared and contrasted:

1. The Outstations System.
2. The System of Small Christian Communities.

children, youth and mothers.¹⁰⁵ The Spokes Model became the SCCs Model of Church.

Some of the local diocesan priests in Musoma Diocese were against this new pastoral plan like Father Tarcisius Sije. Also a number of catechists who had been the right hand of the priest for teaching and payment did not like the change as they were now under the authority of the elders for teaching and payment -- a status that was fitting politically and socially due to their age.

These Luo-speaking parishes were in North Mara and part of Musoma Diocese, Tanzania on the border with Kenya. Across the border was the area that was Kisii Diocese and is now Homa Bay Diocese. The Italian Passionists came in 1970 to serve in Luo-speaking parishes. It would be interesting to research if they used this “*Chama Model of Church.*”

Around the same time in the mid-1960s American Maryknoll missionary Father George Cotter, MM was one of the first pioneers in Sukumaland (the Catholic dioceses in Tanzania where the Sukuma Ethnic Group live) to facilitate Small Reflection Groups of the Sukuma people to use proverbs to get a deeper understanding of Scripture. These groups were the forerunners of SCCs. Cotter’s missionary method was to gather the Sukuma Christians in small circles of eight to 10 people. A key was that these Small Reflection Groups started with life (Sukuma proverbs) and then went to the *Bible*. This experience helped the local Sukuma people appreciate more the wisdom of their Sukuma proverbs and the *Bible*. This can be called a “Sukuma Reading of the *Bible.*”¹⁰⁶

With this interest in SCCs in Eastern Africa Father Joseph Glynn, MM, the Regional Superior of the Maryknoll Society of Fathers and Brothers in Africa asked Father Michael Kirwen, MM to visit Latin America to study the Base Christian Communities (BCCs) and the Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs). In 1968 he visited Maryknoll Parishes in Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and Peru. Surprisingly, he did not find parish-based BCCs similar to the parish-based SCCs in Eastern Africa. The reason was that the first wave of BCCs in Brazil and other countries in Latin America was the Social Action Model and Social Justice Model that was not connected directly to the pastoral life of the parishes. As an example, the Peruvian Theologian Gustavo Gutierrez would teach at the university in Lima during the academic year and then during the holidays go to the barrios and rural areas to interact with base communities of poor people that were not a pastoral, ecclesial structure, but used the See-Judge-Act Reflection Process connected to the Preferential Option of the Poor and Liberation Theology. The second wave of BCCs (now called CEBs) in the 1980s on was more connected to the parish as seen the parish and ecclesial centers model in Chile.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Michael Kirwen, conversation with the author, Maryknoll, New York, USA, 18 April, 2024.

¹⁰⁶ George Cotter, conversation with the author, Maryknoll, New York, USA, 25 June, 2013.

¹⁰⁷ Michael Kirwen, conversation with the author, Maryknoll, New York, USA, 18 April, 2024.

During the Seminar Study Year (SSY)¹⁰⁸ in Tanzania in 1969 coordinated by the Bukumbi Pastoral Institute in the then Mwanza Diocese the concept and praxis of SCCs that were then called "Local Church Communities" were first articulated as a priority in both rural and urban parishes. American Maryknoll missionary Father Daniel Zwack, MM (with comments by Bishop Blomjous, Fr. Stephen Haule and Mr. L. A. Mantanwa) presented the plan of the rural parish of Nyarombo in Musoma Diocese (see above) in a working paper on "Rural Parishes" in 1969 Seminar Study Year, *Summaries and Questions for Discussion in Each Catholic Diocese, Parish and Subparish on "The Church in Tanzania Today: Its Tasks and Priorities,"* Mwanza: Privately Printed, 1969. He stressed "the neighborhood community of some 50 adults within two or three miles of one another. This is the local community." In North Mara they were close together as almost all the people had been baptized in one or another Christian Church. This revised paper later became "Problems and Possibilities in Rural Parishes of Tanzania," Position Paper No. 9, 1969 National Seminar Study Year, Bukumbi: Printed Paper, 1969.

American Spiritan missionary priest Father Joseph Kelly, CSSP points out:

This contribution by Fr. Zwack contained some of the salient facets of what was later to become Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa; however, their hour had not yet come. This part of his Position Paper was hardly mentioned when the questions for discussion were drawn up in preparation for the National Seminar.¹⁰⁹

This is confirmed in the "Findings" of the National Seminar. The one paragraph on "Summary/Conclusions on the Rural Parishes" referred to new forms of ministry, but nothing specifically on small communities.

At the SSY Dutch Missionary of Africa Father J. Brouwer, MAfr presented the SCC Model of Church in the plan of the town parish of Tabora in Tabora Archdiocese that had six

¹⁰⁸ The driving force behind coordinating the SSY was American Maryknoll missionary Father Francis ("Ace") Murray, MM, the Secretary of the Pastoral Department of the TEC and the Director of the Bukumbi Pastoral Institute. He was assisted by American Maryknoll Sister Patricia Madden, MM. For an overview of the process, see F. Murray, "1969 -- A Study Year for the Church in Tanzania," *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 12., No. 1 (January 1970): pp. 71-73 and F. Murray, "No End to SSY," *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (April 1970), pp. 168-171.

Years later when the implementation of the 1994 First African Synod was going slowly in Tanzania, Archbishop Anthony Mayala of Mwanza Archdiocese, Tanzania told the author, "We need is another Frank Murray to animate us on the local level." Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers Africa Region Website, retrieved on 13 June, 2014, <http://www.maryknollafrica.org/History8.htm>

¹⁰⁹ Joseph Kelly, "The Coming of Small Christian Communities to Eastern Africa, in "Report on Consultation on Methods of Research to Find Out How the *Bible* is Being Used in Small Christian Communities in Africa," sponsored and organized by BICAM, Nairobi: Privately Printed, 1989.

wards. Each ward had small groups of Christians that consisted of 10 to 12 families. This is the same number of families as the SCCs in North Mara. These SCCs met regularly to pray, read the *Bible*, discuss their problems and explore how they could best live their Christian lives.¹¹⁰

The one paragraph on “Summary/Conclusions on Urban Areas and Parishes” referred to the importance of the urban apostolate, but nothing specifically on small communities.

These Tanzanian case studies and examples were first documented in articles in the journal *Service* first published by the Bukumbi Pastoral Institute with headquarters in Mwanza and now called TAPRI (Tanzanian Pastoral and Research Institute) that is part of St Augustine University (SAUT) with headquarters in Mwanza. Gradually the names Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and in Swahili *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo za Kikristo* (JNNK) became commonly used.

In 1969 Small Christian Communities started in St. Charles Lwanga Catholic Church, Regiment Parish in an urban area of Lusaka Archdiocese, Zambia. German Missionary of Africa Father Andreas Edele, MAfr explains the process of starting SCCs in the parish through a three-year visitation of parishioners in their homes beginning in 1968. He adds, “We got valuable hints on how to form BCCs from Europe and South America.¹¹¹” But he was keen to improve on what he had heard by including “every Catholic family... not just a small percentage of the Catholic population.”¹¹²

Edele writes:

At the beginning of 1969, sitting together with Sr. Simone Marceau, MSOLA, who meanwhile had joined the Parish Team, and Catechist “Seba,” we planned a new strategy, borrowing ideas from South America, namely establishing “Small Christian Communities”. To start with, we chose an area of twenty to thirty Catholic families. We visited each one of them and invited them for an initial meeting in one of the houses. We explained our intention and asked them to attend eight sessions, at the end of which they were asked to choose leaders for the different services needed in the community. Then we celebrated the Eucharist in the community as a sign that “the Small Christian Community” had been established.

Amazingly, other areas within the parish pleaded with us (like St. Paul) to start similar communities in their place. Therefore, we trained leaders to

¹¹⁰ J. Brouwer, “Problems and Possibilities in Towns and Cities of Tanzania,” Position Paper No. 10, 1969 National Seminar Study Year, Bukumbi: Printed Paper, 1969.

¹¹¹ One possibility is that some of Paolo Friere’s ideas, methods and processes entered Eastern Africa through books such as Anne Hope, and Sally Timmel, *Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers*, 3 volumes, published by Mambo Press, in Gweru, Zimbabwe.

¹¹² Andrew Edele, MAfr, “Establishing Basic Christian Communities in Lusaka, Zambia,” *Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin* 81 (1980), p. 22.

help us in the work of establishing new communities. Within a couple of years, the whole area of Libala, New Chilenje, Chilenje South and practically the whole parish was covered with SCCs. Soon afterwards, they were adopted as pastoral priority in other parishes of Lusaka. Therefore, Regiment Parish can be truly considered as the cradle of the SCCs in Zambia.

I often asked myself, why this pastoral policy was much more effective in town than in rural areas. A possible answer is that as a church, we succeeded to present the SCCs as a “family”. City dwellers miss the natural family.¹¹³ Furthermore, the African family consists not only of the living but also the living dead (ancestors). When we introduced “Patron Saints” it gave to the people an additional identification. In town the SCC gives the family security and solidarity which still exists in rural areas especially in times of misfortune like accidents or deaths. During the whole process, I received more of theological insight from the people, than I was able to give them.¹¹⁴

In 2013 this parish was still going strong with 29 active SCCs in five geographical zones. On Saturday, 30 November, 2013 I participated in the Patron Saint's Day Mass of St. Andrew SCC in St. Charles Lwanga Parish. Of the 30 SCC members there were 4 men, 12 women, six youth and eight children. It was a joyous occasion celebrating SCCs as a "communion of families," one of the choices in our SCCs Poll for November-December, 2013. The SCC members wore their St Andrew's T Shirts and the women dressed in *chitenge* cloth that had the title “St. Charles Lwanga Catholic Parish, Regiment Church Lusaka, Zambia” with a drawing of St. Charles Lwanga and the names of all the SCCs in the parish. Recently the parish started Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) as seen in the poster “Our Way of Being Church.”

¹¹³ “Natural family” is a term used in Africa. It is the fundamental social unit, inscribed in human nature, and centered around the voluntary union of a man and a woman in a lifelong covenant of marriage. “Natural” is not “nuclear,” which would limit its scope, nor is it “traditional,” which would restrict its use in public discourse.

¹¹⁴ Andrew Edele, “The Beginning of Small Christian Communities in Zambia: Some Versions,” in Marc Nsanzurwimo, *Here We Are: 70 Years of Evangelization and Social Concern. Regiment Parish: St. Charles Lwanga Catholic Church (1939-2009)*, Ndola, Mission Press, 2013, pp. 6-7.



In 1970 Small Christian Communities started in Iten Parish in Eldoret Diocese, Kenya. They were called *Kokwet*, the natural local unit meaning “village neighborhood” in the language of the Kalenjin people. The Christian *Kokwet* “met about twice a month in the evening after work with the catechist, read selected passages from the *Bible* and discussed together what it meant to be a Christian. The emphasis was on service.”¹¹⁵

The AMECEA Pastoral Institute of Eastern Africa at Gaba, Kampala, Uganda pioneered study and reflections on new models of church. At a seminar in 1971 there was a discussion on the need and purpose of local Christian communities. One paper stated:

A need has been felt all over the world to create Small Living Christian Communities either within or to replace the parish which is often merely an arbitrary geographical area based on a legalistic and administrative concept. The present situation in the traditional Christian Churches demands a change in structure and a reformation or renewal of local communities... A Christian community has to be a natural community of life, such as a neighborhood, and not an abstract entity as the parish. The actual parishes should be decentralized and divided into Small Local Communities called to be visible expression of the Local Church...

A Christian community has to be a natural community of life such as a neighborhood and not an abstract entity as the parish. The actual parishes should be decentralized and divided into Small Local Communities called to be the visible expression of the Local Church. A type of such communities developed in a few parishes in northern Tanzania shows a way in which they can be formed. The local existing community has the lineage or extended

¹¹⁵ Irish Kiltegan priest Fintan McDonald, “Pastoral Experiment in Kalenjin,” *Mirror*, February, 1972, p. 2.

family as its basis; a basis upon which is built the Christian community – the family of God’s children in which Christian ties transcend or replace those of kinship.¹¹⁶

During the World Synod of Bishops in Rome in 1971 the African delegates present noted that SCCs already existed in Africa.

In the early 1970s Tanzanian Bishop Christopher Mwoleka (who died in 2002), the Bishop of Rulenge Diocese in northwestern Tanzania, began to develop his vision and praxis of small communities based on *Bible* Sharing and practical action. He is considered the bishop founder of SCCs in Tanzania. Mwoleka visited the *vyama* in the parishes of North Mara in Musoma Diocese and other community experiments.

He started lectionary-based small communities in Rulenge called *Vikundi vya Injili* (Swahili for “Gospel Groups”). Gradually they become known in Swahili as *Jumuyia Ndogo Ndogo za Kikristo* (« Small Christian Communities”). They were neighborhood communities of families that would come together weekly for prayer, *Bible* Sharing and practical activities. They paralleled the *Nyumba Kumi Kumi* (Swahili for « Ten Houses »), the socialistic plan of villagization of President Julius Nyerere and the Tanzanian Government, to group houses/homes/families together in the same geographical area. This was part of the policy of *Ujamaa* (Swahili for “Familyhood”). Mwoleka emphasized:

Providentially, the Small Christian Communities, if developed on the right lines, will eventually replace the traditional African extended family or the clan. Just as Baptism transforms a natural baby into a child of God, a Small Christian Community is nothing else but a baptized clan. The clan with all its culture, ethos, relationships and institutions is not destroyed but purified and transformed.¹¹⁷

Malawian Missionary of Africa Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, MAfr¹¹⁸ (who died in 2012) was a great visionary of SCCs. He became the bishop of Lilongwe Diocese, Malawi in 1972. He understood the cultural importance of *Mphakati/Miphakati* (the Chewa, Malawi word for “small family” or “in the midst of/among the people”– referring to the wider family but smaller than a clan) and how they could be inculturated into Catholic pastoral practice. He envisioned these groups as being responsible for Christian formation and helping to raise children in the Catholic faith. Being a biblical scholar Kalilombe valued reading and reflecting on the *Bible*. So in 1972 he encouraged these Catholic Small Family Communities to regularly reflect on the Gospel. So SCCs were born in Malawi and *Mphakati* became the

¹¹⁶ “The Christian Community – Basis for Liturgical Celebration,” *Liturgy and Life in Rural Africa*, Kampala: Gaba Pastoral Papers No. 20, 1971, pp. 1-2.

¹¹⁷ Christopher Mwoleka in Joseph Healey, *A Fifth Gospel: The Experience of Back Christian Values*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books and London: SCM Press, 1981, p. 109.

¹¹⁸ Todd Stratham, “Kalilombe, Patrick,” *Dictionary of African Christian Bibliography* retrieved on Dictionary of African Christian Bibliography Website on 4 July, 2023, <https://dacb.org/stories/malawi/kalilombe-patrick> Written from the viewpoint of a Protestant academic it does not mention Kalilombe’s contribution to AMECEA.

common name. He also hoped these SCCs would become eucharistic communities where the Eucharist would be celebrated on the grassroots level on a regular basis.

Todd Stratham states:

Already in his first pastoral letter as bishop, Kalilombe called on the laity to take their rightful place in the Catholic Church's life and mission, advocating for the establishment of small groups (*Miphakati*) of the faithful who could consider together how to improve the Church's life and ministry, and work together to promote education, health, justice and general well-being in their communities. In this, Kalilombe was a leading African advocate of the ecclesiological model of "Small Christian Communities" [SCCs] (or "Basic Ecclesial Communities"), which was an idea widespread in many Majority World Catholic churches in the wake of the Second Vatican Council's discovery of the "theology of the laity." As a complement to traditional parish ministry, SCCs sought to be authentic incarnations of the gospel at the local level, whereby the gospel would be inculturated in the social, cultural, and religious life of the people.

From 24 November, 1973 to 24 August, 1975 Kalilombe held a Mini-Synod¹¹⁹ in Lilongwe Diocese, Malawi. He was the first bishop in Eastern Africa to start a diocesan pastoral plan of Small Christian Communities on the grassroots level. His "Biography" states:

In 1973 he wrote his first Pastoral Letter for Lilongwe Diocese entitled *Christ's Church in Lilongwe, Today and Tomorrow: Our Diocesan Pastoral Planning Project*. The letter focused on building a self-reliant church. His intention was to build Lilongwe Diocese into a church that is self-ministering, self-supporting and self-propagating. To materialize this vision Bishop Kalilombe called upon all the laity to be actively involved in the whole

¹¹⁹ A complete report on this Mini-Synod is found in the CUEA Master's Thesis by Vincent Fredrick Mwakhwawa:

[Improving Participation of the Laity in Small Christian Communities: a Pastoral Challenge in the Archdiocese of Lilongwe, Malawi](#). Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website retrieved on 13 March, 2022.

As a footnote to AMECEA history this first historic synod in Lilongwe, Malawi in 1973 was called in Chewa, the local Malawian language, "*Mpingo Ndife Tonse*" (the need for active participation of the laity) The second diocesan synod in 2004 to 2006 was called "*Tiyende Limodzi*" (importance of collaborative ministry and unity). Archbishop George Desmond Tambala facilitated the third Archdiocesan Mini Synod in Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi from 30 July 2022 to August 2023 on the theme "Discerning with the Holy Spirit." He states: "We want to take advantage of the Synod [on Synodality] that is happening globally so that we can as well isolate some issues that are very relevant for our Local Church and find possible solutions which will give a better direction to our archdiocese." In the spirit of the *Acts of the Apostles* he said: "It is only when we do things together that we can say we and the Holy Spirit have decided."

life and mission of the church. He thought that this would be possible if there could be small groups in various places where ideas of how to improve and develop the church could be suggested and implemented at a higher level. Such small groups were to be called *Miphakati* in Chewa (“Small Christian Communities”). Consequently a Mini-Synod was, later on, called where such ideas were to be discussed by the Christians at all levels; diocese, deanery, parish, outstation and Small Christian Communities. The bishop had in mind that if *Miphakati* would be established, discussions would not only be spiritual but also involve the integral life of a human being such as socio-political aspects of life involving human rights, justice and peace, education and health, employment in line with its conditions and public morality.¹²⁰

The Pastoral Letter introduced the Mini-Synod that had five sessions that laid down the “Guidelines” and “Regulations” for the running of the church life and activities at the Small Christian Communities (*Miphakati*) level.

Kilaini points out the SCCs link to the African Bantu philosophy and practice of family and clan (*Ubuntu*). Both Mwoleka’s home language and culture of Haya in Bukoba, Tanzania (and neighboring dioceses) and Kalilombe’s home language and culture of Chewa in Lilongwe, Malawi (and neighboring dioceses) reflect the African Bantu cultural values of family and clan upon which the SCCs Model of Church is built. Perhaps this connection to Bantu languages and culture is the key to understanding why in English-speaking Africa SCCs started in the AMECEA Region, the countries in Eastern Africa originally connected to the British Empire such as Tanzania and Malawi. This “Bantu connection” is very different from some of the languages and cultures of West Africa such as in Ghana and Nigeria.

The AMECEA Catechetical Congress on “Towards Adult Christian Community” in Nairobi, Kenya in April, 1973 was one of the first AMECEA-wide meetings to reflect on SCCs. The results are contained in *Gaba Pastoral Paper* No. 29 (later called *Spearhead*). German Fidei Donum missionary Father Max Stetter presented a slide show on SCCs in Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese in Uganda. He points out: “The new way of adult learning we discussed in the congress was an important step in seeing the community as subject and no longer just an object of catechetical and pastoral growth.”¹²¹

This historical research is very enlightening. It shows that already in the original five AMECEA countries – Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia – experiences of SCCs on the grassroots existed in both rural and urban areas before the famous AMECEA Study Conference on “Planning for the Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s” in Nairobi,

¹²⁰ “Biography of Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, Missionaries of Africa (MAfr),” Episcopal Conference of Malawi Website, retrieved on 10 December, 2013, http://www.ecmmw.org/news_updates/kalilombe_BIOGRAPHY.html

¹²¹ Max Stetter in an email message to the author dated 3 August, 2011.

Kenya in December, 1973.¹²² ¹²³ The AMECEA Bishops were known for being pastoral minded and interested in grassroots evangelization.¹²⁴ So they had a pastoral sense and concrete pastoral priorities as they entered this meeting in 1973 to plan for the future.

This AMECEA conference stated: “We have to insist on building church life and work on Basic Christian 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 groups whose members can experience real inter-personal relationships

¹²² Bishop (later Archbishop) James Odongo was the chairman of AMECEA between 1973 and 1979 when SCCs were established as the key pastoral priority. See Joseph Healey, “A Journey with Archbishop James Odongo: Celebrating Our Living AMECEA History,” *CANAA Online Newsletter*, 29 January, 2015, retrieved on 31 January, 2015, <http://www.canaafrica.org/index.php/home/16-latestnews/175ugandan-retired-archbishop-to-celebrate-his-episcopal-golde-jubilee>

and the *AMECEA Online Newsletter*, Issue 078 (January 30, 2015), retrieved on 31 January, 2015, http://amecea.blogspot.com/2015/01/amecea-journey-with-archbishop-james.html?utm_source=AMECEA+Joseph+Newsletter&utm_campaign=92ea633749-AMECEA+Online+Newsletter+6+5+2013&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_85fa866553-92ea633749-6746297

Also as “Celebrating Our Living AMECEA History” in Emeritus Archbishop of Tororo James Odongo, *50 Episcopal Golden Jubilee 1965-2015 – February 21, 2015*, Kampala, Uganda, 2015.

¹²³ Kenyan writer Joseph Ngala and I did further research in January, 2024. We found that as of 31 January, 2024 the following people are still living who were at the December, 1973 AMECEA Plenary Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya:

Bishop Philip Sulumeti
 Cardinal Gabriel Zubeir as a priest
 Archbishop Peter Kairo as a priest
 Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth as a priest
 Father Joseph Healey
 Father Max Stetter
 Mr. Joseph Ngala
 Mr. Francis Njuguna
 Mr. Peter Kiarie

¹²⁴ A concrete example is when the then Bishop Anthony Mayala made a Pastoral Visitation to Iramba Parish in Musoma, Tanzania where I was pastor. He spent five full days celebrating Mass at the main parish center and the four sub-parishes on consecutive days with three days for Confirmations. He met with the Iramba Parish Pastoral Council and participated in one SCC gathering.

and feel a sense of communal belonging,¹²⁵ both in living and working.”¹²⁶ This pastoral policy was in the context of the statement: “We are convinced that in these countries of Eastern Africa it is time for the Church to become truly local, that is, self-ministering, self-propagating and self-supporting.”¹²⁷

At this conference Bishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki of Nakuru Diocese, Kenya presented a sound-slide show on “Planning for the Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s.” Two sections were on “Church as Community” and “Biblical Background.” In the script the two slides on Christian Community had this commentary:

Our objective is to develop more Basic Christian Communities. To achieve this in Eastern Africa we have to take into account the existence of many other Christian Churches, other communities, religious organizations. African Independent Churches and [African] traditional religions.¹²⁸

Looking back we see the importance of putting into practice the challenge of Kalilombe. During this 1973 AMECEA Meeting he said that “*every* bishop,¹²⁹ priest, brother,

¹²⁵ Ugandan Archbishop John Baptist Odama points out that the SCCs pastoral priority and SCCs model of church is founded on African cultural values of community and family. He uses the example of Africans building their houses in a circular or round shape. Then the people sit in a circle inside the house so that everyone can see each other’s faces. Sharing is easier. This promotes community spirit and values. John Baptist Odama, “Talk at the Opening of the SCCs Training the Trainers Workshop For Those Serving in Refugees Ministry,” Lodonga Spiritual Center, Arua, Uganda, 10 August, 2018.

¹²⁶ “Guidelines for the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s,” *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 16, No 1 & 2 (1974), p. 10.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 9-10.

¹²⁸ Raphael Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki, “Planning for the Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s,” Text of Sound-Slide Show,” Nairobi: AMECEA Office, Privately Printed, 16 December, 1973.

¹²⁹ It is often said that bishops are too busy, that they have no time to be with the local lay people, but consider this: There are 168 hours in a week (7 x 24). Participating in a one and one-half hour weekly meeting of a SCC as an ordinary member (with no leadership role) is only 0.89% (less than 1%) of the week. This is a unique opportunity for a bishop to visit the homes of African families and share their lives from the inside.

Tanzanian Bishop Method Kilaini described his participation as a simple member of a SCC in St. Peter’s Parish in Dar es Salaam Archdiocese, Tanzania: “This makes me feel at home in my home surroundings with my neighbors whom I would have otherwise not known. Through them I feel part of the local community. Each week I attend the meetings and participate in all the tasks.” He shocked some Catholics when he joined his SCC members to sweep the church when it was their responsibility. In Rita Ishengoma, *Akamwani: The Challenges of Bible Sharing in Small Christian Communities*, Dar es Salaam: Old East Africa Ltd, 2009, p. 7. After moving to Bukoba Diocese Kilaini is a member of his local SCC that

and sister (and as a corollary, every Catholic) should participate in a particular SCC – not as a leader, but as an ordinary member.”¹³⁰ This reinforces a key priority that ecclesologically all Catholics (priests, religious and lay people) participate in this new way of being/becoming church. Everyone by his or her Baptism is a potential SCC member.¹³¹

This is rooted in the theology that SCCs are not optional, but are the basic unit/basic cell/basic building block/basic foundation/pillar/most local expression of the Catholic Church. That is why ideally we should greet *all* people as Small Christian Community members. During a SCCs Workshop in Lilongwe, Malawi in December, 2013 we had a lively discussion in which some priests resisted this idea of belonging to one SCC saying that the priest serves all SCCs and show not show favoritism to one particular SCC. But it was pointed out that pastorally this can work easily. For example, a priest can become an ordinary member of the SCC in his specific neighborhood or geographical area (that is, where he is actually living). He is a member because he is a Christian, not because he is a priest. Then he serves all the SCCs in the parish in his pastoral role as a priest.¹³²

Let us remember that the leaders of the SCCs are the lay people. This is one reason why SCCs are a new way of being/becoming church, a new model of church.¹³³ Priests, brothers, sisters and seminarians are animators and formators, not bosses. An AMECEA

consists of the priests and sisters living on the bishop’s compound. He says in an email message dated 12 May, 2014: “I love and believe in Small Christian Communities.”

During a Sunday Homily at Holy Cross Parish, Dandora, Nairobi on 16 September, 2018 Bishop John Oballa Owaa of Ngong Diocese, described his personal membership in St. Augustine SCC. He surprised, even shocked, the congregation when he said that he sweeps the church with his SCC members when it is their turn. He quoted St. Augustine: “For you I am a bishop; but with you I am a Christian. The former is a duty; the latter a grace.”

¹³⁰ See South Sudanese Bishop Paride Taban’s “Holy Trinity Peace Village” in Torit Diocese, South Sudan, a communal Christian experiment dedicated to reconciling local peoples across ethnic and religious lines.

¹³¹ St. Monica Parish in Palatka, Florida, USA has an interesting approach. Parishioners who do not participate in a Small Christian Community are invited to be extended members. Each SCC invites, welcomes, prays for and connects with them without any coercion. Shannon Scruby Henderson, "Small Christian Communities: Big Results," *St. Augustine Catholic*, July-August, 2013, retrieved on 30 July, 2013, <http://faithcatholicdigital.com/publication/?i=165210&pre=1>

¹³² **ADD FROM PRINTED BOOK**

¹³³ Another way of understanding this “newness” of the SCCs Pastoral, Ecclesial Model of Church is Brazilian Theologian Father José Marins’ valuable distinction that Basic Ecclesial Communities/Small Christian Communities “are not a Movement in the Catholic Church, but the Church on the Move.” So the SCCs Model of Church is not like the various church movements -- the Marian Movement, the Charismatic Movement, the new Ecclesial Movements, etc. It is different as a “New Way of Being Church” from the grassroots, from below.

Bishop speaking at a World Synod of Bishops in Rome reminded his brother bishops that priests, brothers and sisters are 1% of the Catholic Church while laymen and laywomen are 99%. Tanzanian Bishop Christopher Mwoleka of Rulenge Diocese, Tanzania stated: “In today’s world there is a vocation to Small Christian Communities. The laity are the leaders in responding to this call.”¹³⁴

At the October, 1974 World Synod of Bishops IV Ordinary General Assembly *On Evangelization in the Modern World* Tanzanian Bishop James Sangu of Mbeya Diocese, Tanzania (who died in 1998) was a General Relator. He presented the report on the continent of Africa called “Report on the Experiences of the Church in the Work of Evangelization in Africa” that was compiled from the answers to the questions of the *Lineamenta* (the Latin word for “Outlines” – the first document in the process of a meeting such as a synod) from the African National and Regional Episcopal Conferences. In Sangu’s report Section V on “Communication of Experiences of Evangelization” treats the 12 subjects related to evangelization in the second document, the *Instrumentum Laboris* (the Latin word for “Working Document”), but states: “The order of subjects has been changed to state better the priorities and concerns of evangelization in Africa.”¹³⁵ After No. 1 (“Interior Life”) and ahead of No. 3 (“Liturgical Renewal”) and No. 4 (“Young Churches”), No. 2 on “Small Communities” stated:

The Church in Africa strongly emphasizes the creation of Small Local Christian Communities (SLCCs). Church life must be based on the communities in which everyday life and work take place: those basic and manageable social groups whose members can experience real inter-personal relationships and feel a sense of communal belonging, both in living and working.¹³⁶ Christian communities at this level will be best suited to develop real intense vitality and become effective witnesses in their natural environment. In such authentic communities it will be easier to develop a sense of community whereby the church can exist in Christ’s Body, consisting of many parts (clergy, religious, laity) with many charisms, but making one Body in one Spirit.¹³⁷

African bishops present at this 1974 World Synod of Bishops IV Ordinary General Assembly Fourth Ordinary Synod of Bishops, after examining the specifically African problems related to evangelization, published a famous “Declaration of the Bishops of Africa

¹³⁴ Christopher Mwoleka in Robert Pelton, *From Power to Communion: Toward a New Way of Being Church Based on the Latin American Experience*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.

¹³⁵ James Sangu, “Report on the Experiences of the Church in the Work of Evangelization in Africa,” Fourth Synod of Bishops on “On Evangelization in the Modern World,” in Raymond Hickey (ed.), *Modern Missionary Documents and Africa*, Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982, p. 215. Also published in *AMECEA Documentation Service*.

¹³⁶ This sentence is quoted directly from the 1973 AMECEA Plenary Meeting. This priority resulted from Sangu being responsible for the “Africa Continental Report” that was prepared by him and his AMECEA advisors in Dar es Salaam in 1974.

¹³⁷ James Sangu, “Report,” p. 217.

and Madagascar Present at the Fourth Synod of Bishops on Communion and Co-responsibility in the Church.” The section on “Living Christian Communities” stated.

In the spirit of ecclesial communion so clearly proclaimed by Vatican II, the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar emphasize the essential and fundamental role of Living Christian Communities: priests, religious and laity united in mind and action with their bishop. It is the clear task of these communities, rooted and integrated as they are in the life of their peoples, to search deeper into the Gospel, to set the priorities of pastoral planning and activity, to take the initiative called for by the mission of the Church, to discern, in a spirit of faith where there can be continuity between culture and Christian life and where cleavage is necessary in all aspects of life that hinder the penetration of the Gospel. Every activity in the process of building up our churches must operate in constant reference to the life of our communities. Starting off from these communities we must bring to our Catholic faith, not only those cultural and artistic experiences which are part of our heritage – real even though as yet modest Africanization – but also a theology which enables us to tackle the challenges arising out of our historical background and the ongoing evolution of our society.

During the synod itself in Rome the seven AMECEA Delegates divided the major themes with Kalilombe being responsible for “Basic Christian Communities.” Ugandan Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga (who died in 1991) of Kampala Archdiocese’s intervention on “Formation of Christian Communities” stated:

Discussions about Small Christian Communities are going on nearly everywhere, but since the local situation is so different the conclusions show a wide variety. We want to stress in particular that these communities have to learn to be more outward-looking.¹³⁸

At the end of the synod the seven delegates from the AMECEA countries issued eight *Messages to Eastern Africa*. The *Message to Laity* emphasized the catechists’ role as “animators of small local communities” and that the responsibility of the laity “to coordinate Small Christian Communities at the grassroots lies on the shoulders of lay councilors in cooperation with the clergy.”¹³⁹ So already the AMECEA SCC Key Pastoral Priority (officially to be formulated in 1976) was beginning to take shape.

In 1974 the Masaka Diocesan Synod in Uganda decided to start SCCs throughout the diocese.

In same year Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga, Archbishop of Kampala, convoked a Kampala Archdiocesan Synod to deliberate on the Small Christian Communities as an adopted pastoral program in the archdiocese. After the synod, the cardinal said: “The one-week synod

¹³⁸ Emmanuel Nsubuga, “Three Archbishops from Africa Elected to Synod of Bishops Council,” *AMECEA Information*, 24 October, 1974, p. 1.

¹³⁹ “Messages to Eastern Africa Are Highlight of Synod of Bishops Follow-up,” *AMECEA Information*, 13 November, 1974, p. 1.

that started on 11 August, 1974 and ended on 16 August, 1974 at Ggaba National Seminary was intended in the first place to evaluate what we had proposed in the first five years' plan, and secondly, to make a new plan in response to new needs. This time we have to build up a strong Christian Community starting from the family."¹⁴⁰

On developments in Tanzania Kilaini reports:

Mwoleka was the first bishop in Tanzania to make the Small Christian Communities the official pastoral priority of his diocese and as the basic means of evangelization. In 1974 he could boldly and proudly be able to tell the Tanzanian bishops of his choice. In fact he already made a governing structure with different functions for members of the SCCs. Much of this was copied by other dioceses and finally by the National Directory of Small Christian Communities.¹⁴¹

In June, 1975¹⁴² the Tanzania Episcopal Conference passed a resolution to promote SCCs throughout the dioceses. In November, 1975 Mwoleka and the Diocesan Directors of the Lay Apostolate implemented this resolution by developing a step-by-step plan for starting SCCs throughout Tanzania. He coined the saying: "There is no blueprint for building SCCs." SCCs grow, develop, evolve in different ways from below. If SCCs are a new way of being church from the local level up, a certain searching, experimentation and dying and rising will continue as the grassroots tries to evolve this new inculturated model of church and the seed of a new model of society. Mwoleka also stated that in his diocese "the entire pastoral work

¹⁴⁰ This history is well documented in Ambrose Bwangatto, "A Church Struggling to Answer Her Missionary Vocation," Kampala: Privately Printed, 2018.

¹⁴¹ Method Kilaini, "Small Christian Communities," p. 2.

¹⁴² Ngalula points out the similar development in French-speaking West Africa:

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

Ngalula in Moerschbacher, *Proceedings of the International Symposium*, p. 6.

will be carried out by means of Small Christian Communities."¹⁴³ ¹⁴⁴ Over the years this term “pastoral work” has evolved in a wider and more holistic sense to touch all of life including social development and justice and peace priorities.¹⁴⁵

We have a rich history of SCCs in post-conciliar documents. The World Synod of Bishops took place in Rome in October, 1974 and St. Pope Paul VI's Apostolic Exhortation *On Evangelization in the Modern World* was published in 1975. Section No. 58 on “Base Ecclesial Communities” distinguishes two types of *Communautés Ecclésiales de Base*: those within the structure of the Catholic Church and those outside (where the name is strictly a sociological name). A description of the former is:

In some regions they appear and develop, almost without exception, within the Church, having solidarity with her life, being nourished by her teaching and united with her pastors. In these cases, they spring from the need to live the Church's life more intensely, or from the desire and quest for a more human dimension such as larger ecclesial communities can only offer with difficulty, especially in the big modern cities which lend themselves both to life in the mass and to anonymity. Such communities can quite simply be in their own way an extension on the spiritual and religious level -- worship, deepening of faith, fraternal charity, prayer, contact with pastors -- of the small sociological community such as the village, etc. Or again their aim may be to bring together, for the purpose of listening to and meditating on the Word, for the sacraments and the bond of the agape, groups of people who are linked by age, culture, civil state or social situation: married couples, young people, professional people, etc.; people who already happen to be united in the struggle for justice, brotherly aid to the poor, human advancement. In still other cases they bring Christians together in places where the shortage of priests does not favor the normal life of a parish community. This is all presupposed within communities constituted by the Church, especially individual Churches and parishes.

These BECs are called “a place of evangelization for the benefit of the bigger communities especially the individual churches... a hope for the universal church ...and proclaimers of the Gospel themselves.” This authoritative voice of the pope and the universal church confirmed the direction that the AMECEA countries were taking in building SCCs.

¹⁴³ This is documented in *Small Christian Communities in Tanzania*, Sound-slide show of 94 color slides converted into a video, Nairobi: SONOLUX Media, Africa Service, and Maryknoll: VIDCOM, 1978. The description reads: “The life of Christians in a small, rural village in Western Tanzania is a life of sharing in community. The video shows an example of how the pastoral priority of the Catholic bishops of Eastern Africa -- building Small Christian Communities -- is put into practice on the local, grassroots level.”

¹⁴⁴ This priority is emphasized in other parts of Africa. For example, St. Andrew Parish in Rwanda has the motto “Everything in Small Christian Communities.” Each SCC has its own structure, organization and program coordinated through the parish. Christians are brought together through the SCCs.

¹⁴⁵ The life, apostolic activities and pastoral vision of Mwoleka are described in John Joseph Rwechungura, *Mjue Askofu Christopher Mwoleka: Mtume wa Upendo Upeo wa Yesu*, Karagwe. Tanzania: Privately Printed, 2012.

Another important text that can be applied to SCCs is St. Pope Paul VI's challenge in No. 63:

Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life.

African SCC members have a unique opportunity to communicate the Word of God to people on the local, grassroots level. This is the heart of inculturation in Africa.

Another challenge is No. 41:

For the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing should destroy and at the same time given to one's neighbor with limitless zeal. As we said recently to a group of lay people, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses"... It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus -- the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity.

African SCC members are important witnesses of Jesus Christ and Christian values in their local small communities, neighborhoods and parishes.

These ideas were reinforced by St. John Paul II. In his 1979 Apostolic Exhortation *On Catechesis in Our Time* Section 67 on "In the Parish" refers to "more pertinent and effective small communities" (see also the original stronger worded "Proposition"). In his 1988 Apostolic Exhortation on the *Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful* Section No. 26 on "The Parish" states: "So that all parishes may be truly communities of Christians, local ecclesial authorities ought to foster small, basic or so-called 'living' communities, where the faithful can communicate the Word of God and express it in service and love to one another; these communities are a true expression of ecclesial communion and centers of evangelization, in communion with their pastors."¹⁴⁶ In St. John Paul II's 1990 Encyclical Letter *The Mission of the Church* Section No. 51 on "Basic Ecclesial Communities" states that BECs are "a force for evangelization...good centers for Christian formation and missionary outreach...a great hope of the church."

¹⁴⁶ John Paul II, "On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful" *Christifideles Laici* (Vatican: The Holy See, December 30, 1988), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html

The AMECEA Study Conference on “Building Christian Communities” took place in Nairobi, Kenya in July, 1976.^{147 148} The key statement was: “Systematic formation of Small Christian Communities should be the key pastoral priority in the years to come in Eastern

¹⁴⁷ At this meeting in July, 1976 President Jomo Kenyatta made the now famous statement: “The Church is the conscience of society, and today a society needs a conscience. Do not be afraid to speak. If we are wrong and you keep quiet, one day you may have to answer for our mistakes.” Quoted in the Kenya Bishops *Pastoral Letter* on “Family and Responsible Parenthood,” 27 April, 1979 and in Rodrigo Mejia (ed.), *The Conscience of Society*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995, p. 50. At the AMECEA Study Conference in Nairobi, Kenya in June, 2011 President Mwai Kibaki said in a similar way: “I urge all Church leaders to freely speak out their concerns over issues affecting the lives of our people. As spiritual leaders in our society you shoulder the responsibility of pointing the right way forward, correcting us when we go wrong and ensuring that we remain God fearing men and women.” *AMECEA News*, No. 44 (August 2011), p. 6. This section of his speech on 29 June, 2011 is also found in the DVD on *AMECEA Family of God: Celebrating a Golden Jubilee of Evangelization in Solidarity*. Nairobi: Ukweli Video Productions, 2011.

¹⁴⁸ It is interesting to note the similarity in time to Portuguese-speaking Africa. The First National Pastoral Assembly took place in Beira, Mozambique from 8-13 September, 1977 (two years after independence from Portugal) on the theme “The Ministerial Church and the Small Christian Communities.” The importance of ministries/services in SCCs was emphasized. Mozambique diocesan priest Father Bernardo Suate explained:

The main concerns of this First Assembly were: to move from a triumphant church to a simple and poor one; a Church-Family with freely given reciprocal services; a church well in the heart of the people and well inserted in society; a church that adopts the SCCs to allow creativity and responsibility of all the People of God in building the Local Church; and a Ministerial Church where each member takes his or her responsibility in the church understood as a community of servants (from the “Conclusions”).

A follow-up took place at the Second National Pastoral Assembly from 1-11 January, 1992 in Matola, Maputo on “Consolidating the Local Church” especially through formation starting in the SCCs. Suate explains: “The model of the SCCs was once more adopted as well as the one of a Ministerial Church, a church that is communion and family with active participation of each one of its members (from the “Conclusions”).

See Bernardo Suate, email message to the author dated 9 May, 2014.

Mozambique is one of the nine countries in Southern Africa that belongs to Inter-Regional Meeting of the Bishops of Southern Africa (IMBISA) with headquarters in Harare, Zimbabwe. It includes six episcopal conferences.

Africa.”¹⁴⁹ This is the single most important statement made about SCCs.¹⁵⁰ Kalilombe stated that this decision

is a basic commitment, a serious shift in pastoral emphasis. It is deliberately intended to modify deeply our pastoral system, policy, and practice...We need to adopt a new system, where the basic units of the church are those smaller communities where the ordinary life of the people takes place. If we want the church to live and function actually as a community, then we must go down to that smaller level at which people live and interact in their daily lives. It is in these smaller communities that the church can express itself in a meaningful Christian communion. Such a basic community would be the only realistic base for the church's existence and effectiveness. Here is where the church can exist in an authentic communion. The wider dimensions of the church are not one community, but a communion of communities. The parish is a communion of basic communities within the parish area.¹⁵¹

Thus Kalilombe emphasized that the setting up of Small Christian Communities formed a “decisive turning point”¹⁵² in the pastoral strategy of Eastern Africa. This renewal of pastoral method and structure was a logical consequence of a whole trend in pastoral thinking, planning and experimentation. This renewal understood profoundly the difference between breaking the Catholic Church *down* into small communities and building the church *up* out of small communities. There is a pastoral power in building up the church *up* out of SCCs.

The meeting went on to affirm the essential ecclesial character and characteristics of Small Christian Communities by stating: “The [Small] Christian Communities we are trying

¹⁴⁹ AMECEA Study Conference on "Building Christian Communities," "Conclusions," *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, 18, 5 (October, 1976), p. 250. The precise meaning of “**the key pastoral priority...**” is in the context of planning for the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s. Later it became “**a key pastoral priority ...**” in the context of broader and more inclusive pastoral priorities such as formation and training of personnel, marriage and family, religious education, development and social services and specialized apostolates.

¹⁵⁰ In SCCs Courses and Workshops today one or more classes is devoted to: "The AMECEA Key Pastoral Priority of Building Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa." For example, see: Annotated Syllabus of Two Credit Course “Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today,” Nairobi: Hekima University College and Tangaza University College, 2013.

¹⁵¹ Patrick Kalilombe, "An Overall View of Building Christian Communities," 1976 AMECEA Study Conference, pp. 266-67. For a further explanation of this pastoral shift see Patrick Kalilombe, *From Outstation to Small Christian Communities: A Comparison of Two Pastoral Methods in Lilongwe Diocese*, Berkeley: University of California Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, 1983. An abridged version appears as *From Outstation to Small Christian Communities*, *Spearhead* Nos. 82-85 (June--October, 1984).

¹⁵² Patrick Kalilombe, *ibid.* p. 266.

to build are simply the most local incarnations of the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.”¹⁵³

The Catholic bishops in Eastern Africa chose this SCC key pastoral priority as the best way to build up the Local Churches to be truly self-ministering (self-governing), self-propagating (self-spreading), and self-supporting (self-reliant and self-sustainable). The three selfs are essential characteristics of SCCs as the base/basic level of the church, and by extension, of the Local Church. This is a real self-actualization of the church. The family, the SCC, the outstation, the subparish, the parish, the deanery and the diocese reflect a “Communion of Communities Model of Church” starting from below, from the grassroots.

An important challenge was for the bishops themselves to take “ownership” of this pastoral priority and to make it their very own – not only to support it intellectually (from their head), but to internalize it so that it comes from their pastoral heart and is the source of their pastoral planning. In his “Introduction” to the Plenary “Conclusions” McCauley stated:

The fruit of the Study Conference, it was generally agreed, was the clarification of ideas and the deepening of convictions that the building of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa is a practical policy, and in the case of primary evangelization, a necessity. The participants pledged themselves to work for the conference’s aims and spirit among their associates in their home areas.¹⁵⁴

During this AMECEA meeting the word "small"¹⁵⁵ was specifically chosen to avoid certain undertones of the word "basic." Archbishop Ndingi stated that to call our grassroots communities "small" instead of "basic" is another indication that the movement in Africa was growing on its own, quite independent of what was happening along the same lines in other places such as Latin America.¹⁵⁶

Blomjous was an influential observer at this meeting. Tanzanian theologian Father Laurenti Magesa points out:

¹⁵³ Conclusions, *ibid.* p. 250.

¹⁵⁴ Vincent McCauley, “Introduction,” 1976 AMECEA Study Conference, *ibid.* p. 249.

¹⁵⁵ Years later Pius Rutechura said: "Why do we say **SMALL** Christian Communities? Because *small* is beautiful, *small* is visible, *small* makes you feel like you belong."

¹⁵⁶ Raphael Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki, "Basic Communities: the African Experience" in *A New Missionary Era*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982, p. 100. Jay Carney points out: “It should be noted that AMECEA intentionally adopted the term ‘Small Christian Communities’ in 1976 to distinguish the African movement from its Latin American cousin.” J. J. Carney, “The People Bonded Together by Love: Eucharistic Ecclesiology and Small Christian Communities in Africa,” *Modern Theology* 30: 2, April, 2014, p. 303. Academia Website, retrieved 10 June, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/8361392/The_People_Bonded_Together_by_Love_Eucharistic_Ecclesiology_and_Small_Christian_Communities_in_Africa

Blomjous remarked that “the growing awareness of the presence of Christ and of the Spirit in an authentic community” among the bishops was an encouraging sign. Blomjous concurred with the assertion that the AMECEA bishops themselves had made in 1973 concerning the ecclesiological requirement for the growth of a healthy and mature church, that of “basing the life of the church on Small Christian Communities...” He proposed again that SCCs be made into an integral dimension of the vision and structure of the church in the region.¹⁵⁷

During this time some theologians in Eastern Africa especially the staff of the AMECEA Pastoral Institute in Gaba, Kampala in Uganda were articulating how SCCs are the groundwork for the structure of the whole church. In the "Theology and the Church" section of the book *The Community Called Church* the chapter on SCCs is significantly entitled "The Small Christian Community as Basic Cell of the Church." The book explains "how the policy of building small communities as the most local cells of the church is solidly based on a vision of the church that is both new and old."¹⁵⁸ The pastoral institute modified its nine month residence course at Gaba to include the theory and practice of SCCs.

Kalilombe explained further:

The SCC is the smallest cell of the Church through which the Universal Church lives and breathes. It is the incarnation of the Church of the *New Testament* at the most basic level of people's lives. Through the SCCs, the Church, like Christ, becomes incarnated in the life of the people. She is led by the local people, meets and answers local needs and problems, and finds within herself resources needed for her life. This must be our goal if the SCCs in our parishes are to be dynamic, vibrant, self-reliant and self-ministering.¹⁵⁹

American theologian Maryknoll Father Michael Kirwen, MM stresses the importance of one's theology of church. The SCC only becomes vital and the nucleus if the theology of church operative in the parish sees it as the foundation of the church, the basic building block of the church, the "little church." Otherwise the SCC is just another traditional society, apostolic group or parish organization like the Legion of Mary. I think most pastors still in

¹⁵⁷ Based on Laurenti Magesa, “The Church in Eastern Africa: Retrospect and Prospect” in, Agatha Radoli (ed.), *How Local is the Local Church? Small Christian Communities and Church in Eastern Africa*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, *Spearhead* 126-128, 1993, p. 6.

¹⁵⁸ *The Community Called Church*. Volume 5 of an Experimental Source-book for Religious Education, *Spearhead* No. 60 (December, 1979), p. ii.

¹⁵⁹ Patrick Kalilombe, “Biblical Background of Christian Communities,” *AFER*, 1976, p. 12.

It is significant that the AMECEA Bishops had the vision of the centrality of the *Bible* in the development of SCCs from the very beginning. After great deal of research and consultation, by 2020 we have determined that one of the five essential characteristics of the SCC Model of Church in Eastern Africa is: “Weekly lectionary-based faith-sharing that connects the Gospel to daily life.”

fact deal with and conceptualize the SCC as a club, even though they might give a verbal acknowledgement of their building block nature.¹⁶⁰ Another distinction is that these traditional societies, apostolic groups and parish organizations have their own special charisms in the church while SCCs are part of the very nature of the church.

The well-known Brazilian theologian Father José Marins states: "The BCC is the whole church in a concentrated form. Or to put it another way, it is a germ or a seed which has within itself all the essential elements of the Church of Jesus." Marins also points out that one of the main differences between SCCs and traditional societies/apostolic groups/parish organizations/movements is that the former inculturate from the bottom up (emerge and evolve according to local situations and needs), while the latter normally follow a universal plan from the top down, for example, the *International Constitution* of the Legion of Mary that is applied everywhere.

O'Halloran adds:

There is a helpful analogy regarding the small community possessing all the characteristics of the universal church. In a loaf of bread we find a variety of ingredients: flour, salt, water, yeast. Now if we break off a tiny piece, we find the same ingredients in the piece as in the entire loaf. Just so the Small Christian Community has all the ingredients – characteristics – of the universal church.¹⁶¹

Claver's comment about the Philippines fits the Eastern Africa situation:

The hardest obstacle to overcome concerned the nature of BECs. Repeatedly it had to be said that it is not just another movement like the Cursillo or the Charismatic. Nor was it just another movement like the Knights of Columbus or the Catholic Women's League and hence in competition with these more established bodies. It had to be clearly shown it *is* church itself, the exemplar of a church of communion at the lowest levels of the church. And because it is such, members of any movement or organization must themselves belong to BECs, and help advance them with whatever special contribution to its life that their movement or organization can provide.¹⁶²

Magesa sums up this theological analysis by saying:

But what is the difference between SCCs and other sociological groupings in the [AMECEA] Region and in the world, even if these latter also espouse joy, justice, reconciliation and peace as their goal? The theological core of SCCs has to do with this question. The issue revolves around what values the different types of communities are based on. This determines their quality and status in the eyes of the church. Mere sociological groupings with

¹⁶⁰ Michael Kirwen in an interview with the author in Nairobi in September, 1983.

¹⁶¹ James O'Halloran, *Small Christian Communities*, p. **ADD**

¹⁶² Claver, *Making*, p. 103.

this orientation are important and must be encouraged by the church, but they do not hold the same theological implications as SCCs.

SCCs are groupings of a drastically different, much deeper order: they are formed not only to achieve a goal, whatever that may be, but theologically *they are themselves the goal*. This is because they are the church; they constitute the root from which the wider church emerges. Without them the broader, or “catholic,” church cannot be realized in the manner that Pope Francis describes it in his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*. At least, it cannot endure. Authentic love, joy, peace, justice, and the common good as illustrated in the Gospels grow as a result of *communion*, the theological element that is the essence of SCCs. SCCs are therefore not only “communities” in the usual sense of the word. Each is a communion analogous to a body of Christ that St. Paul elaborates on (1 *Corinthians* 12). Although there are other analogies of church, such as People of God or Family of God, this image of body is still unsurpassable to describe the reality, nature, and even organization of the church.

Any genuine SCC should be the incarnation of the universal church. The characteristics, qualities and functions or ministries of the church Catholic must be incorporated in it at the same time as the church Catholic reflects the characteristics, qualities, and functions found in SCCs. Arising out of the spirit of SCCs, the universal church becomes also a communion, a body with different parts and different functions, but each in harmony with the rest of the others and respectful of them.¹⁶³

This Small Christian Community Model of Church is based on the church as communion (*koinonia*). In terms of contemporary theology this is part of Trinitarian Communion Ecclesiology and a “communion of communities” ecclesiology. There is an African saying *If God lives as a community, we must do the same*. SCC members are called to a life of sharing modeled on the Trinity. This communion also fits into the idea of the World or Global Church mentioned earlier. Starting from the bottom up:

¹⁶³ Laurenti Magesa, “The Joy of Community in Small Christian Communities,” *New People*, No. 149, March-April, 2014, pp. 22, 24.

- a SCC is a communion of families.^{164 165}
- an outstation (also called a chapel, prayer house, outchurch and sub-center) is a communion of SCCs.
- a subparish (also called a Sunday Mass Center) is a communion of outstations.
- a parish is a communion of subparishes.
- a deanery is a communion of parishes.
- a diocese is a communion of deaneries.
- a metropolitan (ecclesiastical province of one archdiocese and suffragan dioceses) is a communion of dioceses.
- a country (for example, the national bishops' conference) is a communion of dioceses and archdioceses.
- A regional bishops' conference (such as AMECEA) is a communion of national bishops' conferences.
- A continental bishops' conference such as SECAM (Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) is a communion of regional bishops' conferences.

¹⁶⁴ Below the parish level Vatican documents and Pope Francis himself use the term “family communities” that can be understood in different senses including Small Christian Communities (SCCs).

In commenting on contemporary USA in his book *Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World*, American Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia Archdiocese states:

It’s really going to be the family that’s going to be the primary tool that God will use to evangelize, beginning with their children of course. But then families associating together in smaller groups, support groups of one another will be very important in the future as well. As parishes are supposed to be, but they’re institutions now rather support groups. Secondly, find ways for those families to network in some circumstances, for instance in a parish, right?

Charles Chaput in John Allen, "Philly’s Chaput on a Post-Christian Culture, ‘Amoris’, and More," CRUX, 2 March, 2017, CRUX Website, retrieved 5 March, 2017, <https://cruxnow.com/interviews/2017/03/02/phillys-chaput-post-christian-culture-amoris>

Chaput’s analysis is right, but he doesn’t go far enough. These small support groups could be dynamic SCCs in the parish that are a “communion of families.” Then the parish becomes a “communion of SCCs.”

¹⁶⁵ “Catholic Women Association (CWA), they all agree, is an organization whose main objective is to empower and give a voice to all Catholic women...While women benefit principally, the whole family benefits eventually. When women are empowered, their husbands get the benefit of partnering with a wife who is aware of her responsibilities and does them with joy. The children also benefit by having responsible mothers who can bring them up well. When such an empowered family gets to the Small Christian Community, the church is powerfully built.” Archdiocese of Nairobi Website, retrieved on 4 September, 2014, <http://www.archdioceseofnairobi.or.ke/index.php?where=articles&category=About%20Main>

- The Universal Catholic or the World Church or the Global Church is a communion of national and continental bishops' conferences.

Important new ideas and initiatives need a voice, a forum, a literature. Over the next two decades especially, the growth of SCCs was documented and fostered by many articles and reports in the *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, *AMECEA Documentation Service (ADS)*, *AMECEA Information*, the *Spearhead Series* (formerly *Gaba Pastoral Papers*) of monographs, *Service* and other publications and communications media. There was a constant description of, and commentary on, the Small Christian Communities. Between 1973 and 1983, for example, 48 bulletins about SCCs were published by the *AMECEA Documentation Service*. A good summary of the 1970s period is found in the section “Towards Small Christian Communities” in the chapter on “Structural Localization” in Dutch missionary and historian Father Albert De Jong, CSSp’s book *The Challenge of Vatican II in East Africa*.

At the 1977 Synod in Rome on “Catechesis in Our Time.” Most of the interventions made by the African bishops revolved around the experience of the Small Christian Communities and their importance in catechetical formation of new converts and seasoned Christians.¹⁶⁶

1978 saw the birth of *Bible Sharing/Gospel Sharing* at the Lumko Missiological Institute in South Africa.¹⁶⁷ Excellent SCC training manuals were published that popularized the Lumko Seven Steps Method of *Bible Sharing/Gospel Sharing*. German Fidei Donum Bishop Oswald Hirmer (who died in 2011) states:

The Seven Steps were developed by the Lumko Pastoral Institute in South Africa and have spread all over the world. They constitute a kind of “agenda” for Small Christian Communities as they bring Christ into the center and encourage active participation in the mission of the church in the neighborhood.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ The bishops’ interventions appear in the entire issue of “The African Bishops Speak,” *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (February, 1978).

¹⁶⁷ From 1970 to 1986 Fritz Lobinger worked at the Lumko Missiological Institute, the Pastoral Institute of the Episcopal Conference for the implementation of [Second Vatican Council](#) in South Africa. Starting in 1974 he visited Brazil several times to study the work of education theorist [Paolo Freire](#). He produced training materials and led training sessions throughout South Africa. At Lumko, Lobinger contributed significantly to the development of the pastoral model of Small Christian Communities, including the model of [Bible Sharing](#).

Due to Lobinger’s connection to Latin America and the Lumko SCC connection to Eastern Africa, it is wrongly assumed that the CEBs of Latin America influenced the development of SCCs in the AMECEA Region. This is not true.

¹⁶⁸ Oswald Hirmer, *Our Joy in Being Catholic: Our Catholic Customs and Beliefs*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2007, p. 87.

Altogether there are eight Gospel sharing methods that can be adapted to the local context and situation. These excellent training manuals have been used throughout the AMECEA Region. Lumko Courses have been conducted in Eastern African countries annually from 1992 to the present.¹⁶⁹ The facilitators of these courses have been Kenyan Loreto Sister Ephigenia Gachiri, IBVM based in Kajiado, Kenya and Ugandan layman Mr. Joseph Wasswa based in Busia Parish, Tororo Archdiocese, Uganda who are both passionate about the “Lumko Way of Being Church.” Wasswa is catechist who coordinates six outstations in his parish following the “Lumko Model of Church.” Loreto Sister Jane Frances Mulongo, IBVM succeeded Gachiri in 2022.

Gachiri gives the example of the Italian Consolata priest Father Thomas Babero, IMC who after completing the Lumko Course for seven years animated SCCs in Kahawa West Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese. He said it would take nine years to implement fully the Lumko Way of Being Church.¹⁷⁰

It is disappointing that these training manuals have not been revised and updated with contemporary examples, stories and references to newer church documents such as the two African Synods.¹⁷¹ There are serious gaps in the content. Our evaluation indicates that new SCC manuals should be written on (alphabetically): Addiction, Child Safeguarding/Child Protection, Ecology/Environment, Family, Human Trafficking, Marriage, Internet/Social Media and Youth/Adolescence. Now we could add: Synodal Church, the Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Online SCCs.

A challenge to dioceses in the AMECEA Region came from Blomfontein Archdiocese in South Africa that went a step further in the pastoral planning and coordination that emphasizes SCCs by establishing this guideline: "If the pastor in a parish with active SCCs is transferred, there is an archdiocesan policy that his successor should also be committed to SCCs."¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ See the “2013 Lumko East Africa Workshop Report” at Tabor Hill Spiritual Center, Nyahururu, Kenya from 9 September to 5 October 2013 by Kenyan diocesan priest Joseph Odongo at: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/lumko.pdf>

¹⁷⁰ Ephigenia Gachiri conversation with the author, Nairobi, Kenya, 5 March, 2015.

¹⁷¹ After years of discernment and study “the August 2013 Plenary Assembly of the South African Catholic Bishops’ Conference resolved to ‘park’ [put on hold/suspend/stop] the Lumko Pastoral Institute for about two years. The process has begun to ensure that the operations of the institute cease in December, 2013. However, the conference center will continue to operate. All are encouraged to make use of this facility for retreats, conferences, workshops.” See the Newsletter of the South African Catholic Bishops Conference *eKhanya*, Vol. 4: 6 (September, 2013). This decision has already seen negative effects. One commentator writes: “SCCs are fewer than twenty years ago, but they still exist. There is no longer a central place from where they are promoted and developed since Lumko has stopped working.”

¹⁷² One comment heard from lay people in Eastern Africa is, “We lay people are the victims of the next pastor/parish priest who comes along.” A similar comment: “We lay people are held hostage by the priorities of the next pastor.” Practically this means that in the clerical, hierarchical-style of the Catholic Church, a parish can have an effective pastoral plan of

Dutch Mill Hill missionary priest Hans Burgmann, MHM introduced SCCs in Kisumu Diocese in 1979. It was part of the new urban apostolate among the poor. The first SCCs were in St. Joseph's Parish, Milimani.

The AMECEA Plenary Study Conference on "The Implementation of the AMECEA Bishops' Pastoral Priority of Building Small Christian Communities: An Evaluation"¹⁷³ took place in Zomba, Malawi in August, 1979.¹⁷⁴ The then Bishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana a'Nzeki gave a paper on "Implementing AMECEA's Pastoral Priority." There were case studies of "Christian Communities in Mbarara Diocese, Uganda" by Ugandan Bishop John Kakubi, "Small Christian Communities in Kigoma Diocese, Tanzania" by Tanzanian Bishop Alphonse Nsabi and "Community Building in an Urban Area in Zambia" by Zambian Bishop Dennis de Jong. The plenary said:

Small Christian Communities are the means by which the church is brought down to the daily life and concerns of the people to where they actually live. In them the church takes on flesh and blood in life-situations of people. In them people are enabled to recognize the mystery of Christ among them.¹⁷⁵

active SCCs, but a new pastor can come in and change this overnight. When I asked some Catholic priests in Kenya about this issue, they answered, "We priests are the victims of the next bishop who comes along."

¹⁷³ Ghanaian Scripture scholar and Missionary of Africa Bishop Richard Baawobr, MAfr points out: "It might be good to establish five year plans with one or two points to implement during a definite period, with tools and formation in that line. The way you [AMECEA] promoted the Small Christian Communities in the 70s shows that when there is focus and a common drive, things move forward." "AMECEA Golden Jubilee Celebration 2011: Congratulatory Message of the Missionaries of Africa," *AMECEA 50 Years of Evangelization in Solidarity: 1961 -- 2011*. Nairobi: AMECEA Secretariat, 2011, p.112.

¹⁷⁴ During a visit to Mombasa Archdiocese in August, 2011 I learned an interesting footnote in SCC history. Kenyan Father Ernest Mutua, one of the founders of SCCs in the archdiocese, explained that when Kenyan Bishop (later Archbishop) Nicodemus Kirima (who died in 2007) was appointed as Bishop of Mombasa in 1978 he was initially against SCCs. He saw them as an offshoot of Protestant sects in Kenya. But then he went to the 1979 AMECEA meeting in Malawi and met and talked with dedicated animators of SCCs such as Mwoleka. Kirima was converted and came back and began to support SCCs starting in his diocese in 1979. This is a good testimony of the learning process that takes place during AMECEA meetings. Ernest Matua in a conversation with the author on 24 August, 2011.

In a subsequent conversation with the now Kenyan Archbishop Martin Kivuva of Mombasa Archdiocese, he explained that in 1979 Father Matua started SCCs in St. Anne Parish, Mgange Nyika in Taita and the then Father Kivuva started SCCs in Our Lady of Fatima Parish, Kongowea. Martin Kivuva in a conversation with the author on 29 August, 2012.

¹⁷⁵ AMECEA, Conclusions of the Study Conference of the AMECEA Plenary 1979: *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 21, No. 5 (1979), p. 266.

The meeting emphasized that SCCs are the neighborhood church that is the embodiment of the One, Holy and Catholic and Apostolic Church and are the best way to renew the church. It said: “Structurally, the Small Christian Community is the most local unit of the Church. The family is the domestic church, but of its very nature it has to reach out to other families, and the Small Christian Community is made up of several family groups. Family catechesis is therefore at the heart of the formation of Small Christian Community.”¹⁷⁶ So the AMECEA Bishops actually went beyond the theology accepted by the Second Vatican Council.

Then the delegates clarified exactly what these SCCs were not:

The Small Christian Communities should not be understood as a fringe group, nor a group for a few elite people,¹⁷⁷ nor a group formed for a particular purpose, such as a prayer group, a sodality, a Catholic Action group, a development group, a study group, though these are legitimate and valuable: it is precisely the means by which the one church is present in each locality, touching the *whole life* of its members.¹⁷⁸

One pastoral resolution stated: “SCCs are an effective way of developing the mission dimension of the church at the most local level, and of making people feel that they are really part of the church's evangelizing work.”¹⁷⁹

The “Conclusions” of the Study Conference made many concrete recommendations. Unfortunately there is a big gap between the ideal and the real. So only a careful evaluation can determine if the following recommendations have been implemented:

1. Young people with representation on the Parish Pastoral Council and other bodies.
2. Small Christian Communities need to be more fully integrated into the training programs in seminaries.
3. No Christian Community can be built up unless it has its basis and center in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist.
4. The ordained priesthood and the general priesthood of the faithful are in collaboration, not competition.¹⁸⁰

There are eight Regional Episcopal Conferences in [SECAM](#) (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar). These three consecutive AMECEA Plenary Meetings (1973, 1976, 1979) clearly show that AMECEA mandated that

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

¹⁷⁷ The leading CEB theologian in Latin America, José Marins, warns against elitism in SCCs, that is, SCCs members feel they are superior and better than the other Catholics in the parish.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 268-272.

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) be the key pastoral priority in Eastern Africa. Why? Why AMECEA? Why Eastern Africa?¹⁸¹ How did these changes occur?

1. Was it the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Was this a spirit moment? Was this a *kairos* moment?
2. Was it a “critical mass” of SCC pastoral and ecclesial experiences and activities on the local, grassroots level in all five original AMECEA countries starting in the late 1960s?
3. Was it the African cultural values of family, community and unity as a sociological foundation on the local, grassroots level found in the ethnic groups in Eastern Africa?
4. Was it the vision and practice of AMECEA as a regional bishops conference? As a service organization to the five national bishops conferences, it could do planning, experimentation and research on a regional level that a national bishops conference could not do.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Concerning English-speaking West Africa our research applied to parishes in Nigeria and Ghana the five essential characteristics or criteria of the AMECEA SCC Model of Church in Eastern Africa. All these essential characteristics or criteria are in the context that in Eastern Africa SCCs are a way of life, not just a program or project in the parish.

1. Size: 15-20 members participate in the weekly physical gatherings of the SCC. The total number of members may be much larger.
2. Weekly lectionary-based faith-sharing that connects the Gospel to daily life.
3. Structurally connected to the parish as a “community of communities” pastoral, ecclesial model of church.
4. Regular practical action and outreach.
5. Ongoing formation and training of SCC leaders and members.

Retired Nigerian Cardinal John Onaiyekan of Abuja Archdiocese pointed out that the SCC Model of Church has never been a pastoral priority in Nigeria because Nigeria has a strong Small Apostolic Groups Model of Church as seen in the lively, active small groups in the Catholic Charismatic Movement, Legion of Mary and the wide variety of devotional associations and organizations for example, specific associations for men and women such as the Confraternity of Christian Mothers, St. Joseph Community for Men, and St. Theresa Sodality for Girls. These groups, associations and organizations do not use lectionary-based *Bible* readings on a regular basis. Conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 21 August, 2012.

Theology students from Ghana in my SCCs classes in Nairobi from 2010-2019 have emphasized that in Ghana there is more focus on small devotional groups than on SCCs. These groups do not use lectionary-based *Bible* readings on a regular basis.

¹⁸² “The three AMECEA Conferences were a great inspiration to get involved in the experiment of being church in a new way. Whereas bishops conferences usually are more concerned with preserving traditions, this was a time of farsighted and courageous ecclesiology.” Max Stetter, email message to the author, 27 July, 2020.

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5. Was it the inspiration and vision of four or five charismatic bishops¹⁸³ (and other church leaders) who read the contemporary signs of the times in the Catholic Church and the local culture in Eastern Africa?
6. Was it the assistance of theologians in Eastern Africa who helped the bishops to go deeper in their reflections and theologizing? The SCCs Model of Church evolved in the context of communion ecclesiology in the Local Church in Africa.¹⁸⁴
7. Was it the positive reception of this SCCs Model of Church by the Christian lay faithful in Eastern Africa (affirmation of the *sensus fidelium*).

Various church observers have said that, with different emphases, establishing Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as the key pastoral priority in Eastern Africa was a combination of all the above examples. There was change and growth in both the theology and the practice.

Clearly there was an ongoing growth process as the Eastern African bishops and other church leaders' understanding of SCCs, and their commitment to SCCs, developed over this seven year period (1973 – 1979).¹⁸⁵ Over the period of the three meetings the bishops and delegates developed a consensus on the importance of SCCs as the key pastoral priority in Eastern Africa including both the new theological foundations and the new pastoral practices. This was a similar process to how the bishops who participated in the Second Vatican Council developed a consensus on key documents over the four sessions. The four year period (1962-65) with theological input, reading, reflection, discussion and discernment in between each session produced deeper and more quality documents. Both collegiality and synodality were are work guided by the Holy Spirit.

In commenting on the AMECEA process or methodology during this 1973 – 1979 period Laurenti Magesa states: “The assistance of theologians in Eastern Africa (specifically the Gaba Pastoral Institute and Gaba publications) was a critical element.”¹⁸⁶ I had the opportunity to visit the Gaba Pastoral Institute in Kampala, Uganda during this time. I recall

¹⁸³ It is noteworthy that two creative bishops who helped to design this SCC Model of Church were elected to the AMECEA Board at the 1973 Meeting: Kalilombe as Vice-Chairman and representative of Malawi and Ndingi as representative of Kenya. Bishop Vincent McCauley, CSC was Secretary General of AMECEA (1973-1979).

¹⁸⁴ Laurenti Magesa cleverly adapts a Nigerian proverb to say, *it takes the whole village to raise this new baby called the SCC model of church*.

¹⁸⁵ Many are concerned that the new and younger bishops in the AMECEA Region today have not gone through this same learning process and so do not have the same convictions and commitment as the earlier generation.

¹⁸⁶ Laurenti Magesa, email message to the author, 25 July, 2020.

joining the staff in the Faculty Sitting Room after supper. Theologians like Brian Hearne and Aylward Shorter would be part of a theological think tank. They would theologize together in a palaver theology or conversation theology style. Out of these encounters came publications like *The Community Called Church*. Volume 5 of an Experimental Sourcebook for Religious Education, *Spearhead* No. 60 (December, 1979). The chapter on SCCs is significantly entitled "The Small Christian Community as Basic Cell of the Church."

Along with his leadership in promoting parish-based SCCs in Rulenge Diocese, Mwoleka was involved in developing an African model of the Catholic Integrated Community -- CIC (*Katholischen Integrierten Gemeinde* in German and *Jumuiya ya Mkamilishano* in Swahili) that is an apostolic community within the Roman Catholic Church. Mwoleka's dream was...**ADD**

The focus in the decade of the 1980s was on the implementation of SCCs as the key pastoral priority in the AMECEA Region. The results were uneven. Some dioceses and countries forged ahead. Others lagged behind. The reasons included church-centered reasons such as the reality that some bishops promoted SCCs, others did not and vast amounts of time, energy and money were devoted to various church events such as papal visits to Eastern Africa, jubilees and anniversary celebrations. Other reasons were political, social and economic such as ongoing civil wars and internal unrest in the region and widespread poverty.

SECAM officially launched SCCs as a pastoral priority in Africa in 1984 stating:

We recommend to Episcopal Conferences, assemblies and associations in Africa to do all they can to encourage the emergence of a pastoral plan for SCCs or Small Ecclesial Communities that are able to undertake integral activities of evangelism and development.¹⁸⁷

The Uganda Episcopal Conference declared SCCs a national policy in 1985.¹⁸⁸

A "Consultation on Methods of Research to Find Out How the Bible is Being Used in Small Christian Communities in Africa" took place in Karen, Nairobi, Kenya in January, 1989. **CHECK**

In 1990 English Bishop James Holmes-Siedle, MAfr (who died in 1995) who spent many years animating SCCs in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda was commissioned to do an evaluation of SCCs in the AMECEA Region that was published as "A Look at 17 Years of

¹⁸⁷ *African Ecclesial Review* (AFER), Vol. 26, No. 5 (October, 1984), p. 259.

¹⁸⁸ Catholic Bishops of Uganda, *Celebrating our Ancestors in the Faith*. Kisubi: Marianum Press, 1985, Nos. 23-24.

SCCs in Eastern Africa.”¹⁸⁹ He recommended the introduction of Mobile SCCs Training Teams¹⁹⁰ to facilitate workshops and seminars on SCCs as was being done in Malawi.

The AMECEA Study Conference on “Evangelization with its Central Issues: Inculturation, Small Christian Communities and Priestly, Religious and Christian Formation” in Lusaka, Zambia in 1992 focused on an “Evaluation of AMECEA.” The research findings identified four AMECEA priorities that included “Promotion of SCCs” and recommended in-service training for animators of SCCs. This conference reiterated the SCC pastoral commitment by stating: “So we repeat that SCCs are not optional¹⁹¹ in our churches; they are central to the life of faith and the ministry of evangelization.”

A major step was the First African Synod¹⁹² in Rome in April, 1994 on the theme “The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission to the Year 2000” with five main topics: “Proclamation of the Good News of Salvation”, “Inculturation”, “Dialog”, “Justice and Peace” and the “Means of Social Communications.” Irish theologian Father Cecil McGarry, SJ (who died in 2009) emphasizes

the growing centrality of Small Christian Communities in the minds of the [synod] fathers and in the documents of the synod. As was seen, they only featured in passing in the Outline [*Lineamenta*]. By the end of the synod they were understood to be essential if the synod is to take root in the Local Churches and thus be effective and produce fruit.¹⁹³

Of the 211 interventions during the first two weeks of the First African Synod, there were 29 interventions on SCCs (the fourth highest number after the topics of justice, inculturation and laity). Bishops from the AMECEA countries were in the forefront in making these interventions. Tanzanian Archbishop Anthony Mayala (who died in 2009) of Mwanza Archdiocese, Tanzania said that “Small Christian Communities seem to be the best way for us of being a church in our African countries.”¹⁹⁴ Kenyan Archbishop Zacchaeus

¹⁸⁹ James Holmes-Siedle, “A Look at 17 Years of SCCs in Eastern Africa,” *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 32, No. 6 (December, 1990), pp. 359-362.

¹⁹⁰ In conversations over the years with two Secretary Generals of the Uganda Episcopal Conference – Fathers Joseph Obunga and John Kauta – both felt that the best pastoral solution for developing SCCs in Uganda was not setting up an office at the National Catholic Secretariat in Kampala, but to set up Mobile SCCs Training Teams to visit the dioceses, seminaries and pastoral centers.

¹⁹¹ The English word “option” (or “optional”) is easily misunderstood and is often used in a pastoral context as one choice among many, that is, not obligatory or necessary. If used to describe SCCs, the better meaning or expression is “preferential option.”

¹⁹² The full official title is the “First Special Assembly of the Synod of African Bishops.”

¹⁹³ Cecil McGarry (ed.), *What Happened at the African Synod?*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995, p. 146.

¹⁹⁴ Anthony Mayala, “Ninth General Congregation,” *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18, 1339 (May 4, 1994), p. 10.

Okoth of Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya said that "Small Christian Communities help implement the ecclesiology of communion... It is of paramount importance that the Synod on Africa recommends the establishment of Small Christian Communities in the parishes, so that the new model of the parish for the year 2000 will be the one of a community of communities."¹⁹⁵

Regarding the "Ecclesiology of the Church as Family" the *Final Message of the Bishops of Africa to the People of God* in Section 28 on "The Church as family and Small Christian Communities" states: "The Church, the Family of God, implies the creation of small communities at the human level, living or basic ecclesial communities... These individual Churches-as-Families have the task of working to transform society." This is an inculturated, contextual African Ecclesiology.

1995 saw the publication and promulgation of St. John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *The Church in Africa* in Yaounde, Cameroon, Johannesburg, South Africa and in Nairobi, Kenya between 14-20 September, 1995. Numbers 23 and 89 treat SCCs:

Number 23 under "The Family of God in the Synodal Process:" "If this Synod is prepared well, it will be able to involve all levels of the Christian Community: individuals, small communities, parishes, Dioceses, and local, national and international bodies."

Number 89 under "Living (or Vital) Christian Communities:" "Right from the beginning, the Synod Fathers recognized that the Church as Family cannot reach her full potential as Church unless she is divided into communities small enough to foster close human relationships. The Assembly described the characteristics of such communities as follows: primarily they should be places engaged in evangelizing themselves, so that subsequently they can bring the Good News to others; they should moreover be communities which pray and listen to God's Word, encourage the members themselves to take on responsibility, learn to live an ecclesial life, and reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel.¹⁹⁶ Above all, these communities are to be committed to living Christ's love for everybody, a love which transcends the limits of natural solidarity of clans, tribes or other interest groups."

Democratic Republic of the Congo theologian François Kabasele Lumbala points out:

The conception of the church as Family of God has its roots deep in Holy Scripture, but it also has anthropological roots in African and Malagasy cultures. This does not push aside the conciliar idea of the church as People of God, but it does emphasize the reality of the family for the African continent as the place where models of ecclesial experience lived out in Africa emerge... This church is lived out at its base as a domestic church, and is given

¹⁹⁵ Zacchaeus Okoth, "Eighth General Congregation," *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6 in Joseph Healey, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*, Unpublished Manuscript, 2021, 72.

¹⁹⁶ Another wording is: "To look at the reality of life around us in the LIGHT OF CHRIST through the reading of the *Bible*." "SCCs Prayer Card," Queen of Peace Parish South B, Nairobi, Kenya.

different names: Christian Base Communities, Living Ecclesial Communities, Small Christian Base Communities.¹⁹⁷

COMMENTARY:

English theologian Philip Knights comments:

Certainly the idea of Basic Ecclesial Communities as the foundational unit of Ecclesiology in the Church as family is not promoted...*Ecclesia in Africa* acknowledges SCCs but dilutes somewhat the "Message of the Synod." No. 21. It does not present the SCCs as a "new way of being Church" or give them a prominent place in discussions. ...The Synod has encouraged debate on the meaning of Church as Family. In these, and other areas, the African Church should seize the moment. The ball is now in the court of the people of Africa: theologians and others may help, but the lasting consequences of the synod now must take place amongst the people, and perhaps particularly amongst the Small Christian Communities.¹⁹⁸

In 1996 German missionary *Fide Donum* priest Max Stetter moderated a seminar at what is now Tangaza University in Nairobi, Kenya on "Urban Small Christian Communities: Between Theological Vision and Pastoral Reality." It was 12 sessions of two hours each. It focused on SCCs in the context of parish/diocesan pastoral plans. It highlighted an evaluation of the SCC Model of Church in Eastern Africa.¹⁹⁹

SCCs became an important part of the *National Plans for the Implementation of the African Synod* in the AMECEA countries. *The African Synod Comes Home -- A Simplified Text* (Pauline Publications Africa, 1995) and other post-synodal documents stressed the importance of SCCs in the follow-up²⁰⁰ and implementation of the recommendations of the First African Synod. This included developing SCCs as a concrete expression of, and realization of, the Church as family Model of Church. This SCC Pastoral Priority was clear in Ndola Diocese, Zambia. The *Ndola Diocesan Guidelines* states: "We share in the universal Church's mission...This is achieved through the establishment of active and fully involved Small Christian Communities."

A key turning point for the growth of SCCs in Tanzania was promoting a model of church from the bottom up. Christopher Cieslikiewicz writes:

¹⁹⁷ François Kabasele Lumbala, "The Church as Family in Africa," *Concilium* 1995/4, p. 93.

¹⁹⁸ Philip Knights, "The African Synod in Rome, 1994: Consequences for Catholicism Consequences for Catholicism," Talk at the Henry Martyn Seminar on 20 May 1999, retrieved on 11 November, 2015 <http://www.afrikaworld.net/synod/knights.htm>

¹⁹⁹ Max Stetter's post on the course PTE411 on the SCCs Facebook Page, 4 May, 2024.

²⁰⁰ A more accurate word is "follow-down" (or "follow-thru") because the natural process is to get the recommendations down (that is, carried out) on/to the local, grassroots level.

The implementation of the new *Constitution of the National Lay Council* in 1998 required that the election of lay leaders in parishes throughout Tanzania start at the level of SCCs and move upwards. This insured that the Parish Council and Parish Pastoral Council²⁰¹ leaders would be chosen from those who were already leaders in their SCCs – thus true representation from below. Such decisions gave full confidence to the faithful and opened new possibilities for the laity in the Local Church.²⁰²

This can also be seen in diocesan synods on the local level. The booklet on the Synod of Mwanza Archdiocese in Tanzania in 2002 contains 105 references to *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo za Kikristo* (JNNK), the Swahili expression for SCCs. There are recommendations on how to development the SCCs Model of Church on the grassroots level.

The year 2000 witnessed the active involvement of SCCs in the Jubilee Year. In Tanzania and other countries the Jubilee Cross was carried from SCC to SCC and then from home to home within a SCC. There were other related pastoral and liturgical activities spearheaded by choirs in the SCCs.

Next was the AMECEA Study Conference on “Deeper Evangelization in the Third Millennium” in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 2002.”²⁰³ Section 7 of the Pastoral Resolutions is on “Building the Church as a Family of God by Continuing to Foster and/or Revitalize the Small Christian Communities,” No. 43 states: “We recommend that a program on the theological and pastoral value of Small Christian Communities be included in the normal

²⁰¹ Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) is a popular term used to emphasize that the council should have a pastoral focus. See the *1983 Code of Canon Law*, No. 536: “A pastoral council is to be established in each parish, over which the pastor presides and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish, assist in fostering pastoral activity.” This council can have commissions on faith formation, finance, liturgy, etc. More and more of these PPCs in Eastern Africa include official representatives of SCCs.

²⁰² Christopher Cieslikiewicz, “Pastoral Involvement of Parish-based SCCs in Dar es Salaam,” in Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton (eds.), *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005 and Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006, p. 99.

²⁰³ The colorful blue *khanga* commemorating the meeting has a map of the AMECEA countries and a drawing of a group of Christians (men, women and children) sitting around a table with a *Bible* in the middle with the words:

AMECEA – *Mzazi wa Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo. Karibu Tanzania 2002.*

AMECEA – Parent of Small Christian Communities. Welcome to Tanzania 2002.

AMECEA Celebrations 40th Welcome to Tanzania 40th

A *khanga* is a rectangle of pure cotton cloth with a border all around it and printed in bold designs and bright colors.

curriculum²⁰⁴ of the Major Seminaries and houses of formation of both men and women.” This and other recommendations were made in the context of a document on the vision of the association: *AMECEA 2002: A Holy Spirit Filled Family of God Committed to Holistic Evangelization and Integral Development.*”

December, 2002 marked the publication of *The Church We Want to Be: Elements for a Common Vision of the Pastoral Action of the Catholic Church in Ethiopia* – a Pastoral Letter of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ethiopia. No 31 states:

The Church we want to be is a church distributed in parishes that are a communion of communities. A church determined to evaluate and revitalize its religious associations and lay movements and open to the new ways of building up Christian communities at a human size in the line of the AMECEA pastoral priority.

Describing the pastoral involvement of parish-based SCCs in Dar es Salaam Christopher Cieslikiewicz writes:

“Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (*Revelations 2:7*). We see the phenomenon of SCCs in the Dar es Salaam Archdiocese as a great sign of the times and the powerful voice of the Holy Spirit. By the year 2004 there were more than 2,000 SCCs in the 46 parishes of the archdiocese and their number is ever increasing. There is not a parish without SCCs and the number of SCCs range from 16 up to 117 in a given parish. Structurally it is a large network that truly transforms a parish into a *community of communities*. In this way SCCs help the parish to become really a living community. Without any doubt these communities have become a powerful force of renewal of the parish structures thanks to pastoral decision to make SCCs the priority for the Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam in 1995.²⁰⁵

The AMECEA Study Conference in Mukono, Uganda in 2005 on “Responding to the Challenges of HIV and AIDS²⁰⁶ within the AMECEA Region” has one pastoral resolution

²⁰⁴ A variety of SCCs courses and workshops are offered in the major seminaries, theological institutes, universities and houses of formation of both men and women in the AMECEA Region. The most recent example is the Salesian Major Seminary in Nairobi, Kenya that started a required course on SCCs in the combined Second Year/Third of Theology in August, 2011. In an interview with the author on 17 May, 2011 Tanzanian theologian Father Laurenti Magesa emphasized that if SCCs have been a key pastoral priority (not just an option) in the AMECEA Region since 1976 they should have more prominence in the curriculum of seminaries and theological institutes.

²⁰⁵ Cieslikiewicz Christopher, “Pastoral Involvement of Parish-based SCCs in Dar es Salaam,” p. 99.

²⁰⁶ **HIV** is a virus that may cause an infection, but **AIDS** is a disease or a condition or a syndrome. Being infected with **HIV** can lead to the development of **AIDS** which stands for “acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.” **AIDS** develops when **HIV** has caused serious damage to the immune system. **AIDS** consists of having **HIV** plus having a very low count of CD4 cells. CD4 cells are part of the immune system, and are attacked/destroyed by **HIV**.

that emphasizes: "Active involvement of SCCs in reaching out to people with HIV and AIDS. SCC members as caregivers, counselors, etc." This can be extended to SCC members reaching out to refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), people traumatized by civil war, violence and tribalism/ethnicity, street children, sick people, bereaved people and other needy people.²⁰⁷

The pattern is clear. As AMECEA meetings were held every three years in different countries in Eastern Africa, the importance of SCCs was emphasized again and again. There has been an on-going momentum for continuing this SCC pastoral priority – a kind of march through AMECEA's 59-year history. Holmes-Siedle's evaluation of SCCs in the AMECEA Region after 17 years, the AMECEA Pastoral Department's survey after 20 years²⁰⁸ and Colombian Bishop Rodrigo Mejia, SJ, the retired bishop of the Soddo Apostolic Vicariate, Ethiopia's evaluation after 26 years set the stage for this present evaluation that now officially covers 47 years (1973-2020).

Many events were happening in individual AMECEA countries. To promote the AMECEA Pastoral Priority of SCCs and to focus on on-going spiritual and pastoral formation a "Year of Small Christian Communities (SCCs)" was celebrated in Dar es Salaam Archdiocese, Tanzania in 2006-2007. Later this was extended to a "National Year of Small Christian Communities (SCCs)" for the whole of Tanzania. Some parishes had their own "Year of Small Christian Communities."

Annual campaigns such as the Kenya Lenten Campaign focused more and more on the involvement of SCCs in justice and peace issues on the local level. Thousands of booklets in both English, Swahili and Gikuyu are used in the weekly SCC meetings in Kenya during the five weeks of Lent. The "See," "Judge" and "Act" process draws on the experience of SCCs on justice and peace related themes. The questions and proposed action steps directly involve SCCs.

In 2008 the AMECEA Office in Nairobi conducted a survey on how Catholic Major Seminaries and Institutes of Theology in the nine AMECEA Countries in Eastern Africa are implementing this resolution. The survey was sent to 22 major seminaries and institutes of theology and the AMECEA Office received 17 answers that represent a 78% return -- well above the normal average for these kinds of surveys.

²⁰⁷ Nigerian theologian Father Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ documents the SCCs' outreach to people with HIV AND AIDS and to refugees in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the Time of HIV AND AIDS, Refugees and Poverty*, Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005), pp. 86-179.

²⁰⁸ Rereading this survey after 25 years in 2020 one notes this insightful comment: "With all this labor and through many ups and downs. SCCs have become part and parcel of the [Catholic] Church's landscape in Eastern Africa." AMECEA Pastoral Department, "Small Christian Communities 20 Years Later: Insights from an AMECEA Survey and Workshop on Small Christian Communities," *AMECEA Documentation Service (ADS)* 10-11/No. 472/1997 (June/July, 1997), p. 1.

The survey shows most of the seminaries and institutes in Eastern Africa do not have a specific course on SCCs. But the importance of Small Christian Communities is taught in a variety of courses including *Bible*, Church History, Ecclesiology and Pastoral (Practical) Theology. Some courses have individual lectures and talks on SCCs such as "The Role of Small Christian Communities in Promoting Justice and Peace." There are also a variety of workshops and seminars on SCCs. A new development is seen in the context of SCCs being an official pastoral structure in the parish and diocese.²⁰⁹ SCCs are treated in some of the new courses such as "Church Management and Administration," "The Internal Ordering on Parishes (Parish Structures)" "Parish Administration," "Introduction to Pastoral Communication,"²¹⁰ "Pastoral Ministry and Management," "Pastoral Planning and Organization" and "Social Media/New Media"²¹¹ in Pastoral Work and Evangelization." These are being offered as both Electives, Seminars and Short Courses.

The AMECEA Study Conference in Lusaka, Zambia in 2008 was on "Reconciliation through Justice and Peace." It was the 16th AMECEA Plenary Assembly. The role and mission of Small Christian Communities is seen in Action Plan A4: "Revisiting the Small

²⁰⁹ Fritz Lobinger, in commenting on the World Church, and particularly the Global South, states: "The priestless communities of the South have already developed a ministry structure of their own. We just have to build on it." Letter to the author dated 28 September, 2013.

²¹⁰ The importance of parish-based SCCs was treated in this course at Tangaza University College, Nairobi in 2014 and was part of the exam question: "Imagine a parish setting and discuss how the media may be used more effectively in Pastoral Ministry."

²¹¹ "New media" is more generic. "New media" refers to on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, and creative participation. Most technologies described as "new media" are digital, often having characteristics of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible, and interactive. Some examples may be the internet, websites, computer multimedia, video games, CD-ROMS, and DVDs. "New media" does not include television programs, feature films, magazines, books, or paper-based publications – unless they contain technologies that enable digital interactivity. "Social media" is the interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. "Social media" technologies take on many different forms including magazines, internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, social networks, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking. Technologies include blogging, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-posting, music-sharing, crowdsourcing and voice over IP, to name a few. Social network aggregation can integrate many of the platforms in use. Examples are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. The boundaries between the different types have become increasingly blurred. In general this book uses the term "social media" because of its link to social networking. See Wikipedia Website, retrieved on 13 April, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_media and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

Over time terms such as the "new media," "modern media" and "contemporary media" have blurred because they have a specific historical context. Each historical age has its own "new media," "modern media" and "contemporary media" and they change with time. Back in the 1940s television was referred to as one of the new media, specifically one of the new mass media. Today the terms social media and digital media are more common.

Christian Communities Pastoral Option as a means of responding to the ministry of reconciliation through justice and peace. The theology of the Church Family of God must be further explored in view of enhancing reconciliation and peace building.”

The AMECEA Synod Delegates Workshop in Nairobi in March, 2009 reflected on the responses to the 2006 *Lineamenta* of the Second African Synod. Delegates emphasized the revitalization of Small Christian Communities through: the importance of *Bible* Reflection in SCCs; deeper evangelization for reconciliation, justice and peace through SCCs; fostering reconciliation in the SCCs themselves; and evangelization to family and youth through SCCs.

On 19 March, 2009 in Yaounde, Cameroon Pope Benedict XVI promulgated the *Instrumentum Laboris* (“Working Document”)²¹² of the 2009 Second African Synod. While the English text of the *Lineamenta* published in 2006 uses the term “living ecclesial communities,” the English text of the *Instrumentum Laboris* published in 2009 uses the more common term “Small Christian Communities” (note the capitals). The French text uses “Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes (CEVs).”

SCCs are mentioned 12 times in the *Instrumentum Laboris* and twice in the footnotes. This is significantly more than in the *Lineamenta* in which “living ecclesial communities” are mentioned three times in the document and twice in the questionnaire. This increase in the importance given to SCCs is clearly due to the many responses from the Episcopal Conferences in Africa and to other answers to the 32 questions of the original questionnaire.

This conference, workshop and documentation helped to prepare the AMECEA Bishops who attended the Second Africa Synod in 2009. At their 29 September, 2009 preparatory meeting the “Statement from Bishops of AMECEA Who Are Delegates to the Synod of Bishops’ Second Special Assembly for Africa (in Rome in October, 2009)” said under B. Our Serious Pastoral Concerns and Challenges, No. 3: “Centrality of Small Christian Community (SCC): we have experienced that a properly trained and led SCC adds great value to the promotion of reconciliation. This is because deeper biblical reflection and more regular use of the Pastoral Circle empower our Christians to engage effectively in the social life around them. Here formation in Catholic Social Teaching (CST) at all levels must be a priority.”

AMECEA Consolidated Reports of Member Episcopal Conferences 2008 – 2011 documents how the eight national episcopal conferences of AMECEA implemented the 16th Plenary Assembly resolutions. Kenya published a series of booklets on topics of Christian values for SCCs connected to themes of the 2009 Second African Synod such as conscience, reconciliation and unity. The National Biblical Commission in Zambia is preparing small booklets on prayer and reflections on reconciliation, justice and peace for use in SCCs.

The Second African Synod itself took place in Rome from 4-25 October, 2009 on the theme: “The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.” No. 22 of the *Message of the Bishops of Africa to the People of God* states: “Here we would like to reiterate the recommendation of *Ecclesia in Africa* about the importance of Small Christian

²¹² Of the 79 footnotes in the 2006 *Lineamenta* only seven are from specifically African sources. Of the 67 footnotes in the 2009 *Instrumentum Laboris* only nine are from specifically African sources.

Communities (cf. *EIA*, 89). Beyond prayer, you must also arm yourself with sufficient knowledge of the Christian faith to be able to “give a proof of the hope that you bear” (1 *Peter* 3:15) in the marketplaces of ideas...We strongly recommend the basic sources of Catholic faith: the *Holy Bible*, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and most relevant to the theme of the Synod, *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*." English Bishop Colin Davies, MHM, the former bishop of Ngong Diocese, Kenya sees these resources as “a very complete list of what would be required of SCCs”²¹³ in their pastoral activities and evangelization.

Small Christian Communities are mentioned seven times in the “Final List of [57] Propositions”²¹⁴ including:

Proposition 35 on “Small Christian Communities (SCCs)” states: “The Synod renews its support for the promotion of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) that firmly build up the Church-Family of God in Africa. The SCCs are based on Gospel-sharing, where Christians gather to celebrate the presence of the Lord in their lives and in their midst, through the celebration of the Eucharist, the reading of the Word of God and witnessing to their faith in loving service to each other and their communities. Under the guidance of their pastors and catechists, they seek to deepen their faith and mature in Christian witness, as they live concrete experiences of fatherhood, motherhood, relationships, open fellowship, where each takes care of the other. This Family of God extends beyond the bonds of blood, ethnicity, tribe, culture and race. In this way SCCs open paths to reconciliation with extended families/multigenerational families that have the tendency to impose on Christian nuclear families their syncretistic ways and customs.”

Proposition 36 on “The Challenges Posed by the New Religious Movements” states: “Parishes are to promote in their Small Christian Communities a fraternal life of solidarity.”

Proposition 37 on “The Laity” states: “Small Christian Communities are to offer assistance in the formation of the People of God and serve as a place for concretely living out reconciliation, justice and peace.”

Proposition 44 on “Catechists” states: “Permanent catechists or those who act as catechists on occasion are the vital heralds of the Gospel for our Small Christian Communities, where they exercise various roles: leaders of prayer, counselors and mediators. They require a solid formation and material support which is necessary for them effectively to assume their role as spiritual guides. They also need to be encouraged and supported in their zeal for service within these communities, especially their service to reconciliation, justice and peace.”

²¹³ Colon Davies, *From Pilot to Pastoral Bishop: Memoirs and Reflections of 53 Years of Missionary Life in Kenya*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2014, p. 114.

²¹⁴ It is interesting to analyze the changes in the references to SCCs (both the wording and the emphasis) from the *Linamenta* to the *Instrumentum Laboris* to the “Propositions” to the actual *Apostolic Exhortation*.

Proposition 54 on “Concern for Prisoners” states: “Prison pastoral care be organized and supported under the Commission of Justice and Peace, with a desk at the regional, national, diocesan and parish levels, in which Small Christian Communities take part.”

A cornerstone of the AMECEA key pastoral priority of building SCCs is *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* that is closely connected to Faith-sharing and faith reflection. Thousands of Lectionary-based²¹⁵ SCCs in the nine AMECEA countries meet in the middle of the week to reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday following the three-year lectionary cycle.²¹⁶ *Hebrews 4:12* says:

For the Word that God speaks is alive and full of power [making it active, operative, energizing, and effective]; it is sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating to the dividing line of the breath of life (soul) and [the immortal] spirit, and of joints and marrow [of the deepest parts of our nature], exposing and sifting and analyzing and judging the very thoughts and purposes of the heart.

St. Jerome said, “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

Historically Protestants²¹⁷ have emphasized the *Bible* more than Catholics in Africa as well as in the rest of the world. This has been changing slowly but steadily.²¹⁸ Now African Catholics are much more at home with the *Bible*. A key factor is has been the emphasis of the *Bible* in SCCs, other apostolic groups and *Bible Study Groups*.

²¹⁵ Some community of religious sisters and other groups meet together daily, especially in the evening, to read and reflect on the Scripture Readings of the following day following the daily lectionary cycle.

²¹⁶ To many Catholic lay people the expressions “lectionary-based” and “lectionary cycle” are churchy “in” words, even jargon that is difficult to understand. Officially the reader of the *Bible* or Scripture readings at mass or a “Sunday Service Without a Priest” is a Lector and he or she reads from a book of *Bible* Readings called the *Lectionary*. We follow a three-year cycle for the Sunday Readings and a two-year cycle for the Daily Readings. The challenge is to communicate this fundamental liturgical plan in simple, user-friendly language. Another expression for Lectionary-based Faith-sharing is Faith-sharing Based on Scripture.

²¹⁷ Some prefer using the term “separated brothers and sisters.”

²¹⁸ During a visit of 22 German teachers and students of pastoral theology and their collaborators to Kenya in March, 2015 to experience the Catholic Church in Kenya including SCCs, German layman Mr. Michael Huhn, a representative of Adveniat, said that German Catholics have crossed two thresholds. First, the stereotype that the *Bible* is a book for Protestants. Now the *Bible* is an essential part of the life of the Catholic Church in Germany including the laity. Second, that it is the priest who teaches the meaning of the *Bible*. By reading and reflecting on next Sunday’s lectionary readings in the middle of the week in small groups such as SCCs, German lay Catholics are becoming more *Bible* literate and not just waiting for the interpretation of the scriptures in priest’s homily on Sunday.

Our Eastern Africa SCC Training Team continues to do research on the use of the *Bible*. The reports are mixed. Recent research in 2014 is based on a random sample and not specific quantitative research. Some examples: Three religious sisters in Monze, Zambia were interviewed on a Saturday afternoon. None of them had read the Gospel of the following Sunday (the next day) either individually or in a group. A lay woman in St. Matia Mulumba SCC in Don Bosco Parish, Makuyu, Nairobi Archdiocese said that “reflecting on the Gospel before hearing it proclaimed at Mass enables her to experience the Word of God more deeply and more personally.” A lay woman in Kenya said that she always reads the daily Scripture Reading on her smartphone. Members of the online Skype SCC said they individually prepare the Gospel text before their weekly *Bible* Sharing. A Catholic evangelist in Kenya said he wants to read the Gospel of the following Sunday ahead of time, but “never seems to get around to it.” For many conscientious Catholics in Eastern Africa, daily *Bible* reading is still not a regular way of life.

American theologian and writer Father Tom Reese, SJ states emphatically: “Lectionary-based Catholics can change the world.” In other words, Catholics who individually, in their families or in their SCCs in the middle of the week seriously reflect on the readings of the following Sunday and their application to our lives can transform themselves and their world. Reese adds:

The [Catholic] Church needs a massive *Bible* education program. The church needs to acknowledge that understanding the *Bible* is more important than memorizing the catechism. If we could get Catholics to read the Sunday Scripture readings each week before they come to Mass, it would be

revolutionary.²¹⁹ If you do not read and pray the Scriptures, you are not an adult Christian. Catholics who become evangelicals understand this.²²⁰

In another place he writes:

The Scripture readings during Advent are full of hope. They are an antidote to the cynicism and despair so prevalent in our age. They are worth reading and reflection. Decades ago, I wrote a column in which I encouraged people to "steal a missalette" so that they could read the Scripture readings at home. Today, that is not necessary. The daily readings are [available online](#), through apps (*iBreviary* and *Laudate*), and as podcasts (Daily Readings from the *New American Bible*).²²¹ Reading the daily Scripture readings is a

²¹⁹ Retired American Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles Archdiocese, describes an imaginary parish in the future in Los Angeles Archdiocese, California, USA:

The readings for the coming Sunday are reflected upon in all groups and meetings in the parish, as well as in the 25 Small Christian Communities scattered throughout the many blocks which make up St. Leo Parish... Scripture study and Faith-sharing takes place in various groups throughout the parish during the week and strengthens the identity of St. Leo's as a communion of communities. Thus the people called together by the Word come to celebrate the Eucharist on Sunday having already reflected at length on the readings. They are prepared for the liturgy and more deeply bonded with other members of the community who have likewise been washed in the Word throughout the week.

As I Have Done for You: A Pastoral Letter on Ministry, 20 April, 2000, retrieved on the Los Angeles Archdiocese Website on 15 July, 2013,
<http://www.la-archdiocese.org/cardinal/Pages/letters.aspx>

NOTE: The word "block" has many meanings in English. A city block is the smallest area that is surrounded by streets. A Block Party or a Street Party is a secular/civic social event of neighbors that is very similar to a neighborhood SCC party. It expresses neighborliness and fellowship. In the Catholic context it is the "Church in the Neighborhood."

²²⁰ Thomas Reese, "The Hidden Exodus: Catholics Becoming Protestants," *National Catholic Reporter*, 18 April, 2011. National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 5 February, 2012,

<http://ncronline.org/news/hidden-exodus-catholics-becoming-protestants>

²²¹ For many years in Eastern Africa I have struggled with helping lectors, especially lay people, prepare the readings of the following Sunday or the scripture readings for a SCCs Meeting. For many "preparation" means finding the right page in the *Lectionary* or the *Missal*. I strongly recommend to practice the reading out loud ahead of time. A wonderful resource is the Daily Readings podcast from USCCB.org. A lector can listen to an expert read the passage out loud to get the proper pronunciation, pace, inflection, cadence, style, etc.

wonderful way to nourish your spirit at any time of the year, but especially during Advent.²²²

Traditionally Catholics have not read the *Bible* regularly in the way that Protestants, and especially Evangelical Christians, do. Yet if a lectionary-based Catholic reads and reflects carefully on the readings of Sunday Mass this would mean 3 readings a week x 52 weeks = 156 x the 3-year Sunday lectionary cycle = 468 readings. Add 12 for special feasts like Christmas that can occur in the middle of the week and one gets 480 Scripture readings mainly the *New Testament*. So over a period of three years a conscientious Catholic can read and reflect on much of the *Bible* and most of the *New Testament*. Going a step further we are called and challenged to read and reflect on the *Bible* every day. For the weekday mass readings this would mean 2 readings a day x 6 days x 52 weeks = 624 x the 2-year weekday lectionary cycle = 1250 Scripture readings that combine both the *Old* and the *New Testament*. One of the choices in the July -- August, 2017 Poll on the SCCs Website is: "Daily Scripture-based Faith-sharing."

Magesa explains this challenge in an Eastern Africa context:

The life of SCCs must be rooted in Scripture – in studying it, seriously reflecting on it, internalizing it, and acting upon it. To spend only a few minutes casually reading and commenting on this or that passage of Scripture once a week, as is the custom in many SCCs, is totally inadequate. SCCs are *theological* communities and as such they must be scriptural communities. If "the study of the sacred page is ... the soul of sacred theology," as Vatican II tells us in the *Constitution on Divine Revelation (Dei Verbum, DV 23)*, then it must form the center of the life of SCCs as well.

Where does the SCC get sustenance for its growth and flourishing? Looking at the example of Jesus himself, we do come up with some essential requirements: they include listening to the Word of God, reflection on it, prayer, and action. The four conditions form a single movement in the dance of inculturation as evangelization in SCCs. All are necessary for the evangelization of the self (or, in this case, evangelization *ad intra*, within one's heart to change personal perceptions and attitudes), and that of the neighbor (*ad extra*, or building up communion, the Reign of God on earth).²²³

Thus reading the *Bible* meditatively every day is a good way to discover God's will.

The liturgical book resource, *At Home with the Word*, is an excellent guide to a deeper understanding of the Sunday Scriptures with insights from Scripture scholars and action steps. It has additional questions, prayers, citations for weekday readings, and other resources for Scripture study. Whether this resource is used alone or in a group, it deepens our experience of the liturgy and helps one to feel ever more "at home" with the Word of God. It recommends: "Whether you use the book for quiet meditation or vigorous study it will

²²² Thomas Reese, "Advent Hope," National Catholic Reporter, 18 April, 2011. National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 4 December, 2015, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/faith-and-justice/advent-hope>

²²³ Laurenti Magesa, "The Joy of Community," p. 26.

nourish you all week long to act on God's Word in the world as you prepare to hear the Scripture proclaimed on Sunday liturgy." It can be used in families with children, parish households, retreats, Recollection Days, RCIA (the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults or the adult catechumenate), Cursillo, Scripture study groups, adult formation groups and other types of small faith communities and groups.

One characteristic of being a Lectionary Based Faith Sharing Catholic is to choose a particular word or phrase or verse or an image from the daily readings, and especially the Sunday readings, -- called a *mantra* -- to use as a *Bible mantra* or *Gospel mantra* or prayer *mantra* or action verse during the day and during the week. Such a particular word or phrase or verse from the *Gospel* of the following Sunday can nourish and sustain a person or a small community all day long and during the week. The expressions in bold are particularly influential/important/significant (18) **ADD**

Some examples:

"Accept the Kingdom of God like a child,"

"the Advocate, the Holy Spirit will teach you everything," "after he had suffered," "after much debate had taken place," "afterwards he changed his mind," "all are alive for God." "all ate and were satisfied," "all day long, both at the temple and in their homes, they did not stop teaching and proclaiming the Messiah, Jesus," "all filled with the Holy Spirit," "all nations shall come to God's light," "all that is mine is yours," "all things are possible for God," "All this I do for the sake of the Gospel," "the Almighty has done great things for me," "always and everywhere," "an ear [to] listen to what the Spirit is saying," "angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream," "announce... proclaim," "anointed with oil many who were sick," "another parable," "the apostles reported all they had done and taught," "appointed 72 others," "are you envious because I am generous?" "Arise. I appoint you as a witness of what you have seen," "as the Father has sent me, so I send you," "as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved," "as the Lord spoke to me, the Spirit entered into me," "as a result of this [Jesus' teaching the Eucharist], many of Jesus' disciples returned to their former way of life and no longer accompanied him," "ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you," "as you go make this proclamation: the Kingdom of heaven is at hand," "at once they left their nets," "at your command, I will lower the nets," "at your word I," "bad and good alike," "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," "bear his or her own cross," "bearing with one another in love," "became white as light," "because of his or her persistence," "because of the hardness

217 Laurenti Magesa, "The Joy of Community," p. 26.

of your hearts," "be compassionate as your heavenly father is compassionate," "be doers of the word and not hearers only," "be fruitful; multiply, fill the earth and subdue it," "the beginning of his signs," "be alert," "be firm, steadfast," "be handed over," "be it done to me according to your word," "be prepared," "be still and know that I am God," "be watchful," "believe," "blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth/land," "blessed are the peacemakers," "blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God," "blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness/ for holiness' sake for theirs is the Kingdom of God," "blessed are those who have not seen and yet they have believed", "blessed are those who hear the Word of God and observe it," "blessed are you who believed," "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," "behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high," "behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age," "be merciful to me a sinner," "be opened!" "be vigilant at all times," "book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ," "both the new and the old," "born of the house of his servant David," "boy," "bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world," "bring glad tidings to the poor," "but Mary sat at home," "but she was greatly troubled at what was said," "but God sent me," "but I chose you," "but to serve," "by another way/route," "by the finger of God I drive out demons," "by another way/route," "by himself to pray," "by patient endurance you will save your lives," "by prayer and petition with thanksgiving," "by saying this you are insulting us too," "call no one on earth your father; you have but one Father in heaven." "care for orphans and widows in their affliction," "carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ," "carry his or her own cross," "carrying the cross himself," "a child is born to us, a son is given us," "children of God," "children of the Most High," "chosen who call out to God day and night," "Christ would suffer and rise," cleanse first the inside of the cup cleanse first the inside of the cup "cleanse first the inside of the cup," clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience," "clothing the naked," "come away and rest a while," "come away by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while," "come over to Macedonia and help us," "come and see," "come, share your master's joy," "come and stay at my home/house," "come to me," "come to me, all of you," "come to me, all who labor and are heavily burdened and I will refresh you/give you rest," "come," "come, and you will see,"

“come let us rebuild our nation,” “come, [you who are] blessed by my Father. Inherit
 the
 kingdom prepared for you from the creation/foundation of the world,” “the coming of
 the Son
 of Man,” “community of believers,” “compelled by the Spirit, I am going to
 Jerusalem,”
 “courage,” “the Creator made them male and female,” “cultivate the ground around it
 and
 fertilize it,” “daily pressure/ burden on me of my deep concern for all the churches,”
 “the day
 was growing hot,” “‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will fulfill
 the good
 promise I made to the people of Israel and Judah,’ “decided to divorce her quietly,”
 “deserted
 place by himself,” “Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?” “discern what
 is of value,” “disciples were first called Christians,”
 “distributed the loaves to those who were reclining” [that is, everyone],” “do here in
 your
 native place,” “do not be afraid,” “do not be afraid, he has risen!” “do not cast me
 from your
 presence or take your Holy Spirit from me,” “do not judge, “do not let your hearts be
 troubled
 or afraid,” “do not worry,” “do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall
 we
 drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’,” “don’t let anyone look down on you because you
 are
 young,” “do to others whatever you would like have them do to you” (“so always treat
 others
 as you would like them to treat you”), “do you also want to leave,” “do you not yet
 have faith,” “do you want to become his disciples, too,” “do you want to be made well,”
 "draw
 your strength from the Lord," “endure your trials as discipline,” “enduring many
 sleepless
 nights,” "enlarge the space of your tent," “except this foreigner?” “even if someone
 should
 rise from the dead,” “even the dogs eat the scraps,” “everyone who has ears should
 listen to
 what the Spirit says to the churches,” “faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by
 action, is
 dead,” “faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead,” “fasted for forty days and forty
 nights,”
 “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do,” “the Father who sent me,”
 “the Father
 who sent me has testified on my behalf,” “the Father will give you another
 90
 Advocate/Counsellor,” the Father will give you another advocate to help you and be
 with you
 forever— the Spirit of truth,” “favor of the Lord was upon him,” “fear no one,” “the
 fig tree
 may bear fruit in the future,” “filled with the Holy Spirit,” “firm foundation that is
 Jesus

Christ," "firstborn from the dead," "firstborn of all creation," "first be reconciled to
 your
 brother or sister," "first fruits of those who have fallen asleep," "flee to Egypt,"
 "follow me,"
 "follow me and I will make you fisherfolk," "food that endures for eternal life,"
 "forgive your
 brother and your sister from your heart," "for every tree is known by its own fruit,"
 "for God
 provides for his beloved during sleep," "for in one Spirit we were all baptized one
 body," "for
 the Holy Spirit will teach you at that moment what you should say," "for it seemed
 good to
 the Holy Spirit and to us," "for Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans," "for
 the life
 of the world," "For to me life/to live is Christ, and death is gain," "for the sake of the
 gospel,"
 "for I was sent for this purpose," "for this purpose I have been sent/have I come," "for
 when I
 am weak, then I am strong," "for where two or three are gathered in my name, I am
 there in
 the midst of them," "for where your treasure is, there also your heart will be," "from
 her
 poverty," "from now on do not sin any more," "fruit of the Holy Spirit is love, joy,
 peace,
 patience, kindness, generosity and kindness," "fruit of righteousness is sown in
 peace," "fruit
 of the tree shows the care it has had," "gathered all they found, bad and good alike,"
 "gift of
 God is eternal life," "give me a drink," "give me this water," "give the Holy Spirit,"
 "given to
 a people that will produce its fruit," "gives his life as a ransom for many," "gives life
 to the
 world," "gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones," "glorify," "go and
 do
 likewise," "go and from now on do not sin anymore," "go and invite everyone to the
 banquet," "go and proclaim the Kingdom of
 God," "go and tell John what you see and hear," "go first and be reconciled with your
 brother
 or sister," "go out, therefore, into the main roads and invite to the feast whomever you
 find,"
 "go therefore and make disciples of all nations," "go into the whole world and make
 disciples
 of all nations," "go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature,"
 "go to
 your inner room," "God blessed them [Adam and Eve] and said: 'Be fruitful;
 multiply, fill
 the earth and subdue it,'" "God causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust alike,"
 "God does
 not ration his gift of the Spirit" "God has visited his people," "God-Hero," "God is
 not the

God of the dead but of the living,” “God is with us,” “God makes the sun rise on the
 bad and
 the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust,” “God of hope fills you
 with all
 joy and peace,” “God of the living,” “God saw all that God made and indeed it was
 very
 good,” “God’s chosen ones,” “God provides [food] for his beloved during sleep,”
 “God so
 loved the world that he gave his only Son,” “God speaks in various ways,” God who
 gives
 endurance and encouragement, “God will be with you and never fail you,” “God will
 see to it
 that justice is done to them speedily,” “good news of great joy,” “great cloud of
 witnesses,”
 “great is your faith,” “great mercy,” “hand of the Lord was with him,” “has none but
 this
 foreigner returned to give thanks to God,” “have faith in God,” “have mercy on me, O
 God,”
 “have no anxiety at all,” “hear the word of the Lord, O nations, proclaim it on distant
 coasts,”
 “hears the word of the Kingdom,” “hears the word of the Kingdom “heavenly Father
 will give
 the Holy Spirit,” “he cured them,” “he died for us so that we may live together with
 him,” “he
 had to rise from the dead,” “he has filled the hungry with good things,” “he learned
 obedience
 from what he suffered,” “he must go to Jerusalem,” “he must increase, I must
 decrease,” “he
 opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,” “he resolutely determined to
 journey to
 Jerusalem,” “he [John] saw and believed,” “he set his face to go to Jerusalem,”: “he
 spent the
 night in prayer to God,” “he stayed there two days/he remained for two days,” “he
 taught
 them as one who had authority,” “he was amazed,” “he was amazed at their lack of
 faith,”
 “he was lost and has been found,” “he was a Samaritan,” “he was transfigured before
 them,”
 “he went around all of Galilee,” “he went away sad for he had many possessions,” “he
 will
 baptize you with the Holy Spirit,” “he would withdraw to deserted places to pray,”
 “Herodias
 harbored a grudge against John,” "here am I; I come to do your will," send me," "here
 I am,
 send me," “here there is no Gentile or Jew, slave or free,” “his disciples remembered
 that he
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 had said this,” “his food was locusts and wild honey,” “his mother kept all these
 things in her heart,” “hold on to what is good,” “the hope that does not disappoint,” “Holy
 Spirit and fire,” “Holy Spirit has been warning me,” “The Holy Spirit said, ‘set apart for me

Barnabas and Paul,” “the Holy Spirit and we have decided,” “Holy Spirit will come upon you,” “Holy Spirit will teach you all things/everything and remind you of all I told you,” “Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name,” “hope does not disappoint,” “house divided against itself cannot stand,” “House of David,” House of Jacob,” “household of God, “how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news,” “how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?” “how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him?,” “hurl him down headlong,” “I am the Alpha and the Omega,” “I am the bread of life,” “I am the gate/I am the door. Whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out, and find pasture,” “I am the Good Shepherd,” “I am He, the one speaking to you,” “I am the light of the world,” “I am the living bread,” “I am the resurrection and the life,” “I am the servant of the Lord,” “I am the way and the truth and the life,” “I am meek and humble of heart,” “I am not worthy,” “I am with you always, even until the end of the world/the end of the age,” “I came to you in weakness and fear and much trembling,” “I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me,” “I chose you and appointed you,” “I desire/want mercy,” “I did not come on my own, but God sent me,” “I face daily the pressure/burden of my care/concern for all the churches,” “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation,” “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts,” “I desire mercy, not sacrifice,” “if I go, I will send him to you,” “I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions,” “I give thanks to my God always on your account,” “I give them eternal life,” “I go and prepare a place for you,” “I have called you friends,” “I have called you by your name,” “I have come so that they may have eternal life and have it more abundantly/to the full,” “I have come to abolish but to fulfill,” “I have come to set the world on fire,” “I have compassion for the crowd,” “I have conquered (overcome) the world,” “I have found my sheep that was lost,” “I have found the coin that I lost,” “I have given you a model to follow,” “I have life because of the Father,” “I have power to lay my life down and power to take it up again,” “I have seen the Lord,” “I know him, because I am from him, and he sent me,” “I lay down my life in order to take it up again,” “I may preach there also,” “immediately the man’s ears were opened,” “I must be in my Father’s house,” “I must go to the other towns too,” I must

proclaim/preach the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the other towns also; for
 this purpose I was sent/I was sent for this purpose," "I must proclaim the good news of the
 Kingdom of God to the other cities also," "I myself will/shall give you words and a
 wisdom,"
 "increase our faith," "inspired by the Holy Spirit," "in humility value others above
 yourselves," "in three days I will raise it up," "in the world you will have trouble, but
 take courage, I have conquered the world," "I rejoice in what I am suffering for you," "I
 shall place my spirit upon him," "I thank my God every time I remember you," "I want to
 see," "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat," "I will do it. Be made clean." "I will
 give you rest," "I will lay down my life for the sheep," "I will not leave you orphans," "I
 will send to you the Spirit of truth," "if it dies, it produces much fruit," "if one member suffers,
 all suffer together with it," "if only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified
 with him," "if today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts," "if you ask anything of
 me in my name, I will do it," "if you had been here, my brother would not have died," "if you
 have faith nothing will be impossible for you," "if we persevere," immediately took
 counsel against him," "increase our faith," "[in Corinth Paul] went to a house belonging to a
 man named Titus Justus," "infant lying in the manger," "In him [God] we live and move
 and have our being." "in my Father's house there are many rooms/dwelling
 places/mansions/abodes,"
 "in my name," "in parables," "in secret," "in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean,
 rise and walk," "in the power of the Holy Spirit," "in the world you will have
 trouble/tribulation/suffering, but take courage, I have overcome the world," "in three
 days I will raise it up," "invite to the feast whomever you find," "I say as the Father told
 me," "it
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 became known that he was at home, "It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us,"
 "It is I.
 Do not be afraid," "It is the Lord," "It is my Father who glorifies me," it is my Father
 who glorifies me, it is my Father who glorifies me, "It is not lawful for you to have your
 brother's wife," "It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything
 beyond the following requirements," "I shall raise him on the last day," "I will not glory save
 in the

cross of our Lord Jesus Christ," "Jacob the father of Joseph," "Jesus appointed
 seventy-two other disciples whom he sent ahead of him in pairs," "Jesus came from Nazareth
 in Galilee and was baptized in the Jordan by John," "Jesus Christ emptied himself, by taking
 the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men," "Jesus Christ humbled himself and
 became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross," "Jesus Christ is able for all time
 to save those who come to God through him," "Jesus distributed the loaves," "Jesus
 interpreted/explained/expounded to them in all the Scriptures [the things concerning
 himself]/[what was said] in all the Scriptures concerning himself," "Jesus journeyed from one
 town and village to another," "Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures," "Jesus
 passed through the midst of them," "Jesus rejoiced in the Holy Spirit," "Jesus resolutely
 determined to journey to Jerusalem," "Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit,"
 "Jesus saw Peter's mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever," "Jesus saw their faith," "Jesus
 sent ahead of him in pairs," "Jesus sent out these
 Twelve," "Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert," "Jesus was made known to them in the
 breaking of bread." "Jesus was praying," "Jesus was revealed to his disciples," "Jesus went
 about doing good works and healing all," "Jesus went up the mountain," "just have faith,"
 "John the Baptizer appeared in the desert," "the kingdom
 of God/heaven belongs to these children, "the kingdom of God will be given to a
 people that
 will produce its fruits," "the kingdom of heaven is at hand," "the kingdom of heaven
 is
 like..." "the kingdom of God/heaven is like a mustard seed," "the kingdom of God is
 among
 you," "the kingdom of God is yours," "the kingdom of God/heaven will be taken
 away from
 you and given to a people who will produce a rich harvest/its fruit," "knowledge of
 the
 mysteries of the kingdom of heaven has been granted to you." "lack of faith," "large
 upper room furnished and ready," "the last will be
 first and the first will be last," "Lazarus was carried away by angels," "lead me in the
 way
 everlasting," "lead you where you do not want to go." "lend expecting nothing back in
 return," "let her keep this for the day of my burial," "let it be done for you according to
 your
 faith," "let love be genuine," "let us keep awake," "let us not grow weary in doing
 good" (another version: "let us
 not give up in doing good"), "let the children come to me," "let the Word of Christ
 dwell in
 you richly/rich as it is," "let us go on to the nearby villages," "let your hope keep you
 joyful,
 be patient in your troubles and pray at all times," "let your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,'" "life in
 his
 name," "a light that shines in the dark, a light that darkness could not overpower,"
 "lilies of
 the field," "like a mustard seed," "listening to them," "listen to him," "listen to what
 the Spirit
 is saying to the churches," "live in the Spirit," "live/remain/abide in me as I
 live/remain/abide
 in you," "the Lord added to their number those who were been saved," "the Lord is
 my
 shepherd; there is nothing I shall want," "the Lord of hosts," "the Lord is my light and

salvation," "the Lord stood by me and gave me strength," "the Lord is the strength of my life," "Lord, to whom shall we go; you have the words of eternal life," "the Lord worked with them," "the lost one," "love," "love God with all your heart," "love our neighbor as ourselves," "love your neighbor as yourself," "Lydia said 'come and stay at my home,'" "Magi (wise men, astrologers) from the East," "make justice your aim," "makes the deaf hear and he mute speak," "make straight/ready the way of the Lord," "make your home in me, as I make my home in you," "making his way to Jerusalem," "many came to believe in him," "Mary arose and went with haste," "Mary has chosen the better part," "Mary of Magdala went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord,'" "Mary treasured all these things and reflected on them in her heart," "the Master has need of them/it," "may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace," "may have eternal life," "may it be done to me according to your word," "may see the light," "may they be one as we are one," "may your love, O Lord, be upon us as our hope is in you," "members of the household of God," "memorial feast," "message is heard through the word about Christ," "message of the cross is the power of God," "ministers of a new covenant," "ministry of the Word," "moved with compassion," "must deny himself/herself, take up his cross and follow me," "must serve the needs of all," "my appointed time draws near," "my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness," "my Heavenly Father has revealed this to you," "my house shall be a house of prayer," "my kingdom does not belong to this world," "my pursuit toward the goal, the prize of God's upward calling in Christ Jesus," "my sheep hear my voice," "my words will not pass away," "nations shall walk by your light," "necessity of praying always and not losing heart/not to lose heart/without becoming weary," "new teaching with authority," "new wine is poured into new [fresh] wineskins," "ninety-nine in the hills," "no one can serve two masters," "no prophet is accepted in his or her own native place," "not as I will, but as you will," "not I, however, but the grace of God that is with me," "not seven times, but seventy-seven times," "nothing is impossible for God," "now have I seen," "now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him," "observe the Word of God," "O give thanks to the Lord, for he is good," "O woman, great is your faith!" "on account of the Son of Man," "one child/one little one," "one of these little ones," "one's life does not consist of possessions," "the one who does the will of my Father in heaven," "the one who humbles himself or herself," "the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest," "the one who sent me," "the one who treated him with mercy," "only faith working through love," "only the Father," "on whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain," "opened the Scriptures to us," "ought not the Messiah/was it not necessary that the Christ suffer these things and then enter into his glory?", "our citizenship is in heaven," "out of the depths I call to you O Lord. Lord hear my cry," "out of joy," "the owner of the house," "passed from death to life," "Paul, called to be an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God," "peace be with you," "people kept coming to him from everywhere," "people will sit at table," "perplexed, but not driven to despair," "person entrusted

with more," "the Pharisees sneered at him," "Philip proclaimed Jesus to him," "pick up your mat and go home," "plans are made in human hearts," "poor widow putting in two mites,"/"poor widow put in two very small copper coins," "pray for those who mistreat you," "pray in the Holy Spirit," "pray that you have the strength" "pray to your father in secret," "pray without ceasing," "pray always," "praying always with joy," "preached in Jesus Christ's name to all the nations," "prepare the way of the Lord," "pressure of my concern for all the churches," "proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins," "proclaiming the good news of God," "proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God," "proclaim on the housetops," "proclaim the gospel of peace," "proclaim the Kingdom of God," "proclaim justice," "a prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household," "the promise the almighty made to our fathers," "publish his glorious deeds among the nations. Tell everyone about the amazing things he does," "put on love the bond of perfection," "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," "put out into deep water," "quiet, come out of him," "ready to open immediately," "reason for your hope," "receive the Holy Spirit," "receives not me, but the One who sent me," "receiving the Word [of God] in great affliction, with joy from the Holy Spirit," "recline at table in the Kingdom of God," "reflecting/pondering on these things in her heart," "rejoice and be glad," "rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer," "rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice! The Lord is near," "rejoice so that they may share in my joy, "rejoice to the extent that share in the sufferings of Christ," "remain in me, as I remain in you," "remains in me and I in him/her," "remember me when you come into your kingdom," "renounce all that he or she has," "repay to God what belongs to God," "repent," "reported all they had done and taught," "rescue me because of our faithful love," "return to me with your whole heart," "returned to give thanks to God," "revealed them to the childlike/infants," "rich in what matters to God," "right side of the boat," "righteous will shine like the sun," "rise, and do not be afraid," "rise, take up your mat and walk," "rising very early before dawn, Jesus left and went off to a deserted place where he prayed," "the sabbath was made for humans," " "salvation has come to this house," "salvation of God," "a Samaritan traveler was moved with compassion," "Scribes and Pharisees began to act with hostility toward him," "Scripture say that the Christ will be of David's family and come from Bethlehem," "seed sown on rich soil," "the seed would sprout and grow, the person does not know how." seek first the Kingdom of God," "seek/search for justice," "to search/seek out and to save what was lost," "send him [Lazarus] to my father's house," "sent them in pairs (twos)," "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God," "Set your hearts on God's Kingdom first, and on God's saving justice, and all these other things will be given you as well," "settled accounts with them," "settle the matter on the way," "seventy-two others whom he sent in pairs ahead of him," "shall have eternal life," "sharing your bread with the hungry," "she gave birth to her firstborn son, "the sign he had done," since they had not repented, "sir, leave it for this year also," "six days before Passover Jesus came to Bethany,"

“sleepless nights and hunger,” “so do not be afraid,” “so do not worry,” “so Mary Magdalene ran,” “so that they may all be one.” “someone else will dress you,” “some seed fell on rich soil,” “sons and daughters of the resurrection,” the Son of Man came eating and drinking,” “the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory,” “the Son of Man coming in the clouds,” “the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve,” “the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath,” “the Son of Man is to be handed over,” “the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and rise on the third day,” “the Son of Man must suffer greatly,” “the Son of Man will come,” “so she [Mary Magdalene] ran,” “so that you also may come to believe,” “so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit,” “so that you may not appear to be fasting,” “so they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem,” “so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth.” “so will the Son of Man be a sign to this generation,” “sown on rich soil,” “speak, Lord, your servant is listening,” “speak to them in parables,” “speak the truth in love,” “spent the night in prayer,” “the Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert,” “the Spirit gives life,” “the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak,” “the spirit of an unclean demon,” “the Spirit of God descending like a dove,” “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me,” “the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot accept,” “the Spirit of truth will guide you to all truth,” “the Spirit of your Father speaking through you,” “standing by the cross of Jesus,” “stay awake,” “stop judging,” “strength that comes from God,” “suffer dishonor for the sake of the name,” “suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope,” “take courage,” “take courage; get up, Jesus is calling you,” “take courage; it is I,” do not be afraid,” “take Mary your wife into your home,” “take up your cross daily,” “take up your cross and follow me,” “tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God before you,” “Tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to listen to Jesus,” “teach and to preach in their towns,” “testify to the truth,” “that foundation is Jesus Christ,” “that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us,” “that the Word of God may speed on and triumph,” “that this cup pass,” “that you may tell your children and grandchildren,” “their hearts are far from me,” “their lack of faith,” “then they accompanied him to the ship,” “then they came to Capernaum,” then they will fast,” “there am I in the midst of them,” “there is a baptism with which I must be baptized,” “there is a house for us from God that is everlasting,” “there is neither slave nor free person,” “there is a season for everything; a time for every occupation under heaven,” “there was given me a thorn in my flesh,” “therefore, stay awake/watch,” “these little ones,” “they abandoned their father Zebedee,” “they abandoned their nets,” “they all ate and were satisfied,” “they all ate until they had enough,” “they announced all these things to the eleven and to all the others.” “they are choked by the anxieties and riches and pleasures of life.” “they became enraged,” “they came to believe the Scripture,” “they departed for their country by another way,” “they escorted him to the ship,” “they left everything and followed him,” “they made him carry it [cross] behind him,” “they may see your good deeds and glorify your Heavenly Father,” “they

rejoiced exceedingly with great joy," "they returned to Jerusalem with great joy," "they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem," "they went forth and preached everywhere," "they went from village to village proclaiming the good news," "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit," "they will be called children of God," "they will lay hands on the sick and they will recover," "things that come out from within," "thinking [not] as God does," "this day you will be with me in paradise," "this is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another/if you love one another," "this is my blood of the covenant," "this is my body," "this is the will of my Father," "this is truly the savior of the world," "this Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven," "this kind can only come out through prayer," "this man was a Samaritan," "those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons and daughters of God," "those who have not seen and have believed," those who hear the word of God and act on it." "those who hear the word of God and act on it," "through accompanying signs," "through the cross," "through the Holy Spirit," "through this belief," "through those who hear the word of God and act on it," "thrown down the rulers from their thrones," "Thus it is written that the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead on the third day," "tiny whispering sound," "today you will be with me in paradise," "to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self," "to every season," "to fulfill," "together with some women," to give his life as a ransom for many, "to God what belongs to God." "to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst," "to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord," "to seek and save what was lost," "to serve," "to us a child is born, to us a son is given," "to you will I offer sacrifice of thanksgiving, and I will call upon the name of the LORD," "transcendent power belongs to God and not to us," "trust in the Lord with your whole heart and do not rely on your own understandings," "the truth will set you free," "twelve wicker baskets with fragments," "two by two," "the two Marys ran to announce this to his disciples," "unless each of you forgives your brother and your sister from your heart." "unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit," "unless your righteousness/goodness surpasses the Scribes and Pharisees," "until the day he was taken up," "until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead," "until the whole batch was leavened/rises," "until you have been clothed with power from on high," "yes, Lord," "Yes, Lord. I have come to believe that you are the Messiah," "you also must be prepared," "you also testify," "you are all sons and daughters of light/of the day," "you are anxious and worried about many things," "you are the Christ, the Son of the living God," "you are the light of the world," "you are not far from the Kingdom of God," "you are the Son of God." "you are thinking as human beings do," "you are thinking [not] as God does," "you are witnesses of these things," "you cannot serve both God and money/mammon," "you did not recognize the time of your visitation," "you do not know when the appointed time will come," "you have but one Father in heaven," "you have revealed them to the childlike," "You may go; your son will live.' The man believed what Jesus said to him and left,"

“you must be prepared in the same way,” “you ought to wash one another’s feet,” “you shall love your neighbor as yourself,” “you will be able to tell them by their fruits,” “you will find rest for your souls,” “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you,” “your alms may be in secret,” “your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit,” “your brother will rise again,” “your faith has saved you,” “your Father has been/is pleased to give you the kingdom,” “your Father who sees what is hidden,” “your joy may be complete,” “your light must shine before others,” “your light must shine in the sight of men and women,” “your partnership for the gospel from the first day until now,” “your sorrow will turn to joy,” “your Word is a lamp for my feet, a light for my path,” “wash one another’s feet,” “was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” “watch,” “water shall come out of it, that the people may drink,” “we are ambassadors for Christ,” “we are more than conquerors through him that loved us,” “we await new heavens and a new earth,” “we cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard.” “we have the mind of Christ,” “when I am weak, I am strong,” “when you give a feast invite the poor,” “we had hoped,” “we have/hold this treasure in earthen vessels/clay jar so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us,” “we may be called the children of God,” “we must celebrate and rejoice,” “we ought to stop troubling the Gentiles,” “we proclaim Christ crucified.” “weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning,” “well did Isaiah prophesy about your hypocrites,” **“what can I offer to/give back to the Lord for all he has done for me?”** **“what Christ has accomplished through me,”** “what God has united, humans must not divide,” “what I tell you in the dark, you must speak in the light,” “What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life?” “what you have seen and heard,” “whatever you ask in my name, I will do, “whatever you ask the Father in my name he will give you,” “when I am weak then I am strong,” “when Jesus saw their faith,” “when Quirinius was governor of Syria,” “when the Son of Man had risen from the dead,” “when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed,” “where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them,” “where you go I will go,” “whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother,” “whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me,” “why do you not know how to interpret the present time?” “widow contributed from her poverty,” “with God all things are possible,” “with great power the apostles bore witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus,” “with all your heart,” “with the Holy Spirit and fire,” “with the strength that comes from God,” “with many such parables he spoke the word to them,” “witness,” “will be able to come between us and the love of God,” “will be called greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven,” “will of my Father,” “who brings from the storeroom both the new and the old,” “who do you say that I am?” “who is my neighbor?” “who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” “who then is this about whom I hear such things?” “whoever boasts, should boast in the Lord,” “whoever does the will of my Heavenly Father,” “whoever eats this bread will live forever,” “whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life,” “whoever humbles himself/herself will be exalted,” “whoever humbles himself/herself like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven,” “whoever keeps my word will never taste death,” “whoever loses one’s life will save it,” “whoever receives me receives the one who sent me [the Father],” “whoever receives one child...receives me,” “whoever receives the one I send receives me,” “whoever therefore humbles himself/herself as this little child,” “whole city was shaken,” “whom he also named apostles,” “whose sandal strap I am not worthy to untie,” “woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” “woe to you,” “the wolf shall live with the lamb,” “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” “worship God in spirit and in truth, “write in a book all the words I have spoken to you.”

Reflecting on SCCs in Africa, O'Halloran states: "Once the members take the *Bible* in their hands, reflect on the Word of God and take responsibility to act upon it, things can never be the same again."²²⁴

Mantras have many uses. A church or home can be decorated with liturgical themes and verses from the scriptures: on banners, wall posters, TV monitors, drawings, photographs, plaques, calendars, etc.

A similar approach is to use a liturgical *mantra*, for example, in Advent season "Why purple" and "Remember the meaning of purple." Or a devotional mantra: "Jesus," "Jesus, have mercy," "My Lord and my God, and "pray for me a sinner." Some paper and online resources have a Daily *Bible* Verse. Smartphones have an audio reading of the *Bible* passages.

Another way of being a lectionary-based Catholic is to choose a particular person in the *Bible*, or more specifically in the Sunday Gospel, to be your companion during the week. Say that on Monday in the First Week of Advent you read the Gospel of the following Sunday (Second Sunday of Advent). You choose John the Baptist to be your companion (and conversely you are his companion). For the next six days you walk with him (and conversely he walks with you). By Sunday you have gotten to know him much better and he leads you into themes of preparation, repentance and simple lifestyle of the Advent Season. Your participation in the Sunday Eucharistic Celebration is deeper and richer.

The World Synod of Bishops on the "Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church" took place in Rome in October, 2008. *The Word of the Lord*, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation of Benedict XVI was published in 2010. No. 73 on "Letting the *Bible* Inspire Pastoral Activity" states:

It is good that pastoral activity also favors the growth of *small communities*, 'formed by families or based in parishes or linked to the different ecclesial movements and new communities' (*Proposition 21*) which can help to promote formation, prayer and knowledge of the *Bible* in accordance with the Church's faith.

No. 85 on "The Word of God, Marriage and the Family" states: "The Synod also recommended the formation of small communities of families, where common prayer and meditation on passages of Scripture can be cultivated." This includes a prayerful, meditative reading of the *Bible* called *Lectio Divina* (also called "Dwelling in the Word") and emphasis on a communal reading of the *Bible*. Again this authoritative voice of the pope and the universal church confirmed the direction that the AMECEA countries are taking in building SCCs that are solidly rooted in the *Bible*.

Already in the *Instrumentum Laboris* of this synod the experience of *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection in Africa was recognized and affirmed:

The newness of *Lectio Divina* among the People of God requires an appropriate pedagogy of initiation which leads to a good understanding of

²²⁴ James O'Halloran, *Living Cells*, p. 207.

what is treated and provides clear teaching on the meaning of each of its steps and their application to life in both faithful and creatively wise manner. Various programs, such as the Seven Steps,²²⁵ are already being practiced by many Particular Churches (Local Churches)²²⁶ on the African continent. This form of *Lectio Divina* receives its name from the seven moments of encounter with the *Bible* (acknowledging the presence of God, reading the text, dwelling on the text, being still, sharing insights, searching together and praying

²²⁵ This refers to the Seven-Step Gospel Sharing of Lumko (South Africa).

²²⁶ The term Particular Church is enshrined in the documents of Vatican II and the new *Code of Canon Law*. But it is undergoing new meanings in new contexts as explained by Laurenti Magesa:

Perhaps the most important inspiration of Vatican II as far as Africa is concerned has been the need to construct an African Local Church or African Local Churches. The council used the term “Particular Churches” because many in the council, following curial conviction, argued that in the diocese structure we already have local churches. But this is not how the idea has been understood and developed in Africa since then. The need for a Local Church is seen in a new, different light.

The term “Particular Church” is seen in Africa to be a juridical-structural [administrative] term; it identifies the church with the diocese. The notion of “Local Church,” however, is favored in Africa because it is perceived as going beyond that geographical and juridical circumspection by taking into account theological-pastoral implications. It emphasizes the necessity of culture and inculturation in catechesis, preaching and the celebration of the liturgy. It accepts the reality of the faith at any level: continental, regional, diocesan, parochial, Small Christian Community, and even family levels as contextual.

Laurenti Magesa, “Expanding Horizons: The Church in Africa Beyond 50 Years of Vatican II,” *Tangaza Journal of Theology and Mission*, 2012/2, p. 33. Tangaza University College Website, retrieved 4 November 2017, <http://www.tangaza.ac.ke/theology/img/journals/Tangaza%20Journal%202012-2.pdf>

For me the “Particular Church” is somewhat static. But “Local Church” is dynamic conveying a sense of being alive, growing, evolving. It is interesting that official Vatican documents are using the term “Local Churches” more. For example, Pope Francis's “Message for 2014 World Mission Day” (19 October, 2014) stated: “On this World Mission Day my thoughts turn to all the Local Churches. Let us not be robbed of the joy of evangelization! I invite you to immerse yourself in the joy of the Gospel.”

This Ebook prefers to use the term Local Church/Local Churches. The Local Churches challenge and enrich each other. The Local Churches in Africa can challenge and enrich the World Church/Global Church/Universal Church.

together) in which meditation, prayer and sharing the Word of God are central.²²⁷

In 2010-2011 the AMECEA Office in Nairobi conducted research on an “Evaluation of AMECEA Pastoral Mission of Evangelization in Solidarity 1961-2011.” The questionnaire was straight forward: “In what ways are you involved in promoting unity and solidarity²²⁸ in the parish and diocese, promoting/participation in Small Christian Communities?” The design of the study emphasized that the decision to start AMECEA and its original constitution as well as the establishment of Small Christian Communities were original and foundational initiatives. In the “Executive Summary” Conclusion 3 under “The key priority challenges facing AMECEA dioceses today continue to be” states: “Promotion of Christian families and Small Christian Communities as means of deepening and consolidating the achievements gained in the last 50 years of evangelization.” De Jong put it this way: “A new missionary period has definitely set in, in which Small Christian Communities play a pivotal role in the evangelization and pastoral system.”²²⁹

The Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of the Congo under the Patronage of the National Episcopal Conference of the Congo sponsored the 27th Theological Week of Kinshasa in Kinshasa, DRC from 21 to 25 February, 2011 on the theme “The Experience of Basic Living Ecclesial Communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives after 50 Years” (“L’expérience des CEVB en RD Congo: Perspectives théologiques et pastorales 50 ans après”). This conference commemorated the 50th Anniversary of “Living Ecclesial Communities” in DRC (1961-2011). As a sign of unity and conscious solidarity with Eastern Africa, in the day devoted to “Other Experiences of CEVB in DRC and Elsewhere,” Msgr. Pius Rutechura, the then Secretary General of AMECEA (and now the Vice Chancellor of CUEA), gave a paper under the heading “Echoes of English-speaking Africa: AMECEA” entitled “The Experience of the AMECEA Region with Small Christian Communities, Pastoral Priority since the 1970s.”

Gulu Archdiocese in Uganda held its Second Archdiocesan Synod on the theme “Called to Build the Church Rooted in Christ’s Love and Truth” from 8-20 May, 2011 with the specific purpose of developing a five-year Pastoral Plan. Decree 10 under “Lay Apostolate (Adults, Youth and Children)” states: “The Parish Priests and Catechists shall immediately ensure that Small Christian Communities are created and strengthened to model the life of Christians.” In his letter to promulgate the Synod Acts Ugandan Archbishop John Baptist Odama called on Christians at all levels from the diocese down to the family and

²²⁷ *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod of Bishops, XIII Ordinary General Assembly, *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Vatican: Vatican Press, 2008, No. 38.

²²⁸ The importance of the value of solidarity reminds me of my personal practice of getting up every day at 3 a.m. I do this for various reasons. One reason is that I am in solidarity with African farmers who wake up very early in the dark and walk one to two hours to their fields and African city workers who wake up very early in the dark and board buses for the one to two hours trip to their downtown jobs.

²²⁹ Albert De Jong, *Father Michael Witte of Kabaa High School Missionary and Educationalist: A Study in Mission Strategy*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2011, p. 222.

including the SCCs to implement the deliberations “so that we may grow in our faith and own our church.”

The 17th AMECEA Plenary Assembly on “AMECEA Family of God Celebrating the Golden Jubilee of Evangelisation in Solidarity” took place in Nairobi, Kenya from 27 June to 6 July, 2011. It included a celebration of the successes of SCCs and a reflection on the challenges of SCCs in Eastern Africa especially during the 1973-2011 period. The booklet *AMECEA 50 Years Evangelization in Solidarity: 1961 – 2011* presents a “Timeline” of the history of SCCs in the AMECEA Region. The 40 minute DVD documentary *AMECEA Family of God: Celebrating a Golden Jubilee of Evangelization in Solidarity*²³⁰ focuses on the AMECEA Founding Fathers and stresses the importance of SCCs. It is based on interviews with AMECEA bishops and staff and is produced by Ukweli Video Productions in Nairobi, Kenya. In the section on “Recommendations for the Future” Bishop Rodrigo Mejia has these prophetic words. “AMECEA should try as a kind of strategy for the future to reach countries of the periphery such as Ethiopia that has a very particular Local Church ...using the structures of the Local Church.”

The 28 minute DVD documentary *50 Years of AMECEA* narrates the beginnings of AMECEA and its growth including the development of the pastoral priority of SCCs. It is also based on interviews with AMECEA bishops and staff and is produced by Catholic Media Services in Lusaka, Zambia.

The AMECEA Study Session has four resolutions about SCCs in the context of Resolution No. 1: “Developing a Comprehensive Ten Year Pastoral Plan comprised of recommendations on the various issues and concerns. The plan must include a theological framework of addressing key issues and challenges of ‘New Evangelization in Solidarity in the AMECEA countries:’”

Resolution No. 3: “Enhance Initial and Ongoing Quality Formation of Pastoral Agents at All Levels.” This resolution came from discussion on pastoral concerns or problems that prevent deeper evangelization. This wide-ranging resolution applies to the following pastoral agents who are involved in SCCs:

- a. Lay people who are leaders of SCCs (called by many names such as animator or coordinator).
- b. Catechists.²³¹
- c. Religious men and women.

²³⁰ While the DVD has been well received, it has been pointed out that all the interviews are with bishops and priests. No lay people, women or youth are interviewed. One wonders how they will feature in a DVD produced in 2061 on the Second 50 Years of AMECEA.

²³¹In the original plan of SCCs catechists were not the leaders of SCCs, but rather the animators just as the priests and religious men and women. Today they can play a big role such as in Machakos Diocese where they receive special training in the Diocesan Catechist School and are significant promoters of the SCCs. Martin Kivuva in a conversation with the author on 3 October, 2013.

- d. Priests.²³²
- e. Seminarians.
- f. Youth.
- g.

Resolution No. 5: “Evaluating and Revitalizing the AMECEA Pastoral Option of Establishing Small Christian Communities.”²³³

Resolution No. 17: “Enhancing participation in liturgy, holy sacraments and the Word of God and fight against devil worship and witchcraft diligently and systematically by living and witnessing the Catholic Faith. Building capacities of the faithful to respond to these challenges by utilizing Scripture and values from the Social Teachings of the Church.”

What is new here is to mobilize SCCs in the fight against witchcraft. SCCs in Zambia have been involved in this campaign for many years.

Resolution No. 19. “Revisiting self-reliance and self-sustainability strategies by exploring and sharing opportunities within the region. Developing Catholic value-based investment policies involving lay professionals and Christians right from Small Christian Community levels in ownership and management at appropriate levels.”

There were many references to the AMECEA pastoral priority of SCCs in the talks and discussions. One report stated: “Among the major achievements of the organization is the creation of Small Christian Communities.” Another recommendation emphasized to strengthen SCCs by ensuring priests’ participation. SCCs were stressed as one of the important African Models of Church. The Missio Aachen and Missio Munich delegates from Germany praised the African Church for three special gifts that can help the Catholic Church in Europe: first, optimism, combined with joy and emotion at liturgical services; second, SCCs that help solve the situation of the declining numbers of priests and also strengthen the personal witness and knowledge of the faithful; and third, methods of *Bible Reflection*. One African delegate stated: “Small Christian Communities (SCC), with their spirit of neighborliness is another big achievement for AMECEA. Joining SCCs is no longer voluntary but a mandate of every Catholic in the AMECEA region. Other regions are following in the footsteps of AMECEA on SCCs.”

Pope Benedict XVI promulgated the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africa’s Commitment (Africae Munus)*²³⁴ in Ouidah, Benin in West Africa on 19 November, 2011. Sections related to SCCs are:

²³² Recent workshops for priests include these titles: “The Challenge to Kenyan Diocesan Priests to Be Animators in Small Christian Communities (SCCs).” “Priests Animating the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church in Kenya Today.” For sisters: “African Sisters as Animators of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa.”

²³³ A good example of follow-up/implementation is the November, 2012 research questionnaire designed by Ugandan diocesan priest Father Benedict Mayindwe of Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese, Uganda on “A Pastoral Approach towards the Reawakening of Small Christian Communities in St. Charles Lwanga Catholic Parish, Lwangiri, Uganda.”

²³⁴ It is a document with 177 numbers and 226 footnotes. There are no footnotes related to specifically African sources such as documents, statements and meetings of national, regional

Number 42 under “The Family:” “The family is the ‘sanctuary of life’ and a vital cell of society and of the Church. It is here that the features of a people take shape; it is here that its members acquire basic teachings.”

COMMENTARY: In communion Ecclesiology the family is the Domestic Church (or Miniature Church or Church in the Home) and the SCC is a communion of families.

Number 92 under “Traditional African Religions:” “The Church lives daily alongside the followers of traditional African religions. With their reference to ancestors and to a form of mediation between man and Immanence, these religions are the cultural and spiritual soil from which most Christian converts spring and with which they continue to have daily contact. It is worth singling out knowledgeable individual converts, who could provide the Church with guidance in gaining a deeper and more accurate knowledge of the traditions, the culture and the [practices] of the traditional religions.”

and continental episcopal conferences in Africa. The *literary genre* of recent Papal documents such as the last three *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations* does not use explicit quotations of local or regional experiences or theological works. A *Simplified Text of Africa’s Commitment* edited by the AMECEA Pastoral Department was published in July, 2012 and translations were made in various local African languages as was done after the publication of the *Apostolic Exhortation of the First African Synod* in 1995.

Pope Francis reminds us: “Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: ‘We have always done it this way’ So his 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si (Praise Be to You)* is different and quotes from local sources in his effort to be more collegial and more decentralized. More than 10 percent of the footnotes – 21 out of 172 – contain citations of documents from bishops’ conferences around the world. Francis quotes bishops from 15 nations including South Africa. Francis also cites two regional bodies of bishops – the Latin American Episcopal Conference (CELAM) and the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC) – both of which represent regions of the world where the perceived consequences of global warming and climate change are most keenly felt. Thus most of his references are drawn from bishops in the Global South. John Allen comments: “With *Laudato Si* Francis effectively has pioneered a new model for the development of official Catholic teaching, one in which the church’s center takes its peripheries seriously indeed.”

John Allen, “The Encyclical’s Footnotes Say a Lot About This Pope,” *CRUX’s Website*, retrieved on 23 June, 2015, http://www.cruxnow.com/church/2015/06/20/the-encyclicals-footnotes-say-a-lot-about-this-pope/?s_campaign=crux:email:daily

An Editorial in *Tablet* comments:

Equally novel is the Pope’s willingness to quote from the statements of a very large number of national and regional bishops’ conferences. It is an impressive consensus, and shows a welcome willingness to allow bishops’ conferences to feed into the development of the papal Magisterium.

Tablet, 269/9105 (20 June, 2015), p. 2., *Tablet Website*, retrieved on 20 June, 2015, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/downloadpdf/200615issue.pdf>

COMMENTARY: SCC members on the grassroots have a special opportunity to dialog with members of African Religion. Magesa points out: “It remains to be seen, however, whether this important recommendation will be seriously implemented in the African dioceses, parishes and Small Christian Communities.”²³⁵

Number 111 under “Priests:” “Build up the Christian communities by your example... Devote yourselves intensely to putting into practice the diocesan pastoral plan for reconciliation, justice and peace, especially through the celebration of the sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist, catechesis, the formation of lay people and on-going dialog with those holding positions of responsibility in society.”

COMMENTARY: The 2011 AMECEA Plenary Assembly emphasized the important role of priests in the formation of lay pastoral agents such as SCC animators and coordinators.

Number 131 under “Lay People:” It can be helpful for you to form associations in order to continue shaping your Christian conscience and supporting one another in the struggle²³⁶ for justice and peace. The Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and the ‘new communities’ are fundamental structures for fanning the flame of your Baptism.”

COMMENTARY: In most official documents of the Catholic Church the traditional parish is the basic juridical unit of the Church. It is significant that SCCs are now called fundamental structures. SCCs are the ideal place for shaping Christian consciences.

To participants in the Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) in Rome in 2015 Pope Francis' described its identity as “a living experience of communion and service, especially to the poorest,” adding:

It is necessary to maintain simple ecclesial experiences within the reach of all, as well as simple pastoral structures. Experience teaches that large bureaucratic structures analyze the problems abstractly and run the risk of having the church far from the people. And, because of this, concreteness is important: the concreteness, that the reality can be touched.²³⁷

SCCs in Eastern Africa are a simple pastoral structure on the grassroots.

Number 63 under “Young People:” “I encourage you to place Jesus Christ at the center of your lives through prayer, but also through the study of sacred Scripture, frequent recourse to the sacraments, formation in the Church’s social teaching, and your active and enthusiastic participation in ecclesial groups and movements.

²³⁵ Laurenti Magesa, “Translating Theology into Pastoral Action, *New People*, No. 137, March-April, 2012, p. 19.

²³⁶ The word “struggle” is mindful of the common Portuguese call for action: *A luta continua. The struggle continues.*

²³⁷ “Pope's Address to Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM),” *Zenit: The World Seen from Rome Daily Dispatch*, 9 February 2015.

COMMENTARY: This reference to ecclesial groups and movements is an opening to form Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) or Youth SCCs.

Number 133 under “The Church as the Presence of Christ:” “The Church is ‘in Christ, a sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of the unity of the entire human race.’ As the community of Christ’s disciples, we are able to make visible and share the love of God. Love ‘is the light – and in the end, the only light – that can always illuminate a world grown dim and grant us the courage needed to keep living and working.’ This is clearly seen in the universal Church, in dioceses and parishes, in the SCCs, in movements and associations, and even in the Christian family itself, which is ‘called to be a ‘Domestic Church’, a place of faith, of prayer and of loving concern for the true and enduring good of each of its members,” a community which lives the sign of peace. Together with the parish, the SCCs and the movements and associations can be helpful places for accepting and living the gift of reconciliation offered by Christ our peace. Each member of the community must become a ‘guardian and host’ to the other: this is the meaning of the sign of peace in the celebration of the Eucharist.”

COMMENTARY: SCCs are places to live Christ’s gift of reconciliation and peace. SCC members exchange a sign of Christ’s peace with each other and with others in the spirit of solidarity, unity and commitment/responsibility to each other. Footnote 186 states that this section draws on *Proposition 35* of the Second African Synod.

Number 150 under “The Sacred Scriptures: “I recommend that the biblical apostolate be promoted in each [Small] Christian community, in the family and in ecclesial movements.”

COMMENTARY: The Biblical Center for Africa and Madagascar, commonly known as BICAM that is located in the SECAM Headquarters in Accra, Ghana and other networks have a unique opportunity to promote the biblical apostolate on the African continent by encouraging national and diocesan organizations, offices and centers and organizing workshops and seminars.

Number 151 under “The Sacred Scriptures:” “Each member of Christ’s faithful should grow accustomed to reading the Bible daily! An attentive reading of the recent Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* can provide some useful pastoral indications. Care should be taken to initiate the faithful into the ancient and fruitful tradition of *Lectio Divina*.²³⁸ The Word of God can lead to the knowledge of Jesus Christ and bring about conversions which produce reconciliation, since it is able to sift “the thoughts and intentions of the heart” (*Hebrews* 4:12). The Synod Fathers encouraged Christian parish communities, SCCs, families and associations and ecclesial movements to set aside times for sharing the Word of God. In this way, they will increasingly become places where God’s word, which builds up the community of Christ’s disciples, is read, meditated on and celebrated. This word constantly enlivens fraternal communion (cf. *1 Peter* 1:22-25).”

²³⁸ “As we celebrate the Feast of St. Benedict today we are reminded of the importance of *Lectio Divina* (prayerful, meditative reading of the *Bible*) in our SCCs and applying the daily Scripture readings to our everyday lives.” Small Christian Communities Facebook Page, retrieved on 11 July, 2012, <https://www.face-book.com/pages/Small-Christian-Communities/279921983315>.

NOTE: Pope Francis emphasizes the importance of the *Bible* in Numbers 174-175 under “Centered on the Word of God” in *The Joy of the Gospel*. “All evangelization is based on the Word of God listened to, meditated upon, lived, celebrated and witnessed to.” He affirms the importance of the practice of *Lectio Divina* in Numbers 152-153 under “Spiritual Reading.”

The AMECEA Pastoral Department states:

The promulgation of the Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*) by Pope Francis, has challenged us to reflect on ways of proclaiming the Word of God joyfully to all. SCCs provide one of the most effective ways of proclaiming the Word of God through *Bible* sharing. This document “Logical Framework” is aimed at strengthening and promoting the AMECEA model of building the Local Church around SCCs. It provides a systematic structure for on-going formation, evaluation and capacity building in order to make the SCCs at various levels of the life of the Church to be very effective places for evangelization.²³⁹

COMMENTARY: This confirms the central place of *Bible* sharing and *Bible* reflection in the life and ministry of SCCs. Lectionary-based Faith-sharing SCCs can be places of brotherly and sisterly communion that foster reconciliation and deeper sharing.

Number 169 under “Missionaries in the Footsteps of Christ:” In the context of the new evangelization “all Christians are admonished to be reconciled to God. In this way you will become agents of reconciliation within the ecclesial and social communities in which you live and work.”

COMMENTARY: This echoes many synod documents that encourage SCC members to become agents of reconciliation in their own faith communities on the local, grassroots level, in their natural, human communities and in the wider society.²⁴⁰

A related section is Number 14 of the document where the pope states:

The Synod made it possible to discern the principal parameters of mission for an Africa that seeks reconciliation, justice and peace. It falls to the Particular Churches (Local Churches) to translate these parameters into “resolutions and guidelines for action.” For it is “in the Local Churches that the specific features of a detailed pastoral plan can be identified – goals and methods, formation and enrichment of the people involved, the search for the necessary resources – which will enable the proclamation of Christ to reach people, mold communities, and have a deep and incisive influence in bringing Gospel values to bear in [African] society and culture.”

²³⁹ “The Logical Strategic Framework for the Revitalization and Strengthening of SCCs as a Way of Being Church as Family in the AMECEA Region (April, 2014 – March, 2017),” Nairobi: AMECEA Secretariat, 2014, p. 5.

²⁴⁰ Bukina Faso Scripture Scholar Father Paul Bere, SJ helped me very much to interpret the original French text of this Apostolic Exhortation.

COMMENTARY: SCCs are an essential as part of the Local Churches in Africa where concrete pastoral activities that promote reconciliation, justice and peace can be carried out such as molding communities of living faith.

After promulgating the Apostolic Exhortation in Benin, Pope Benedict XVI made this important statement:

I am deeply convinced that Africa is a land of hope. Here are found authentic values which have much to teach our world; they need only to spread and blossom with God's help and the determination of Africans themselves. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* can greatly assist in this, for it opens up pastoral horizons and will lead to creative initiatives. I entrust it to the faithful of Africa as a whole, to study carefully and to translate into concrete actions in daily life.²⁴¹

The SCCs have a special call and challenge to translate the main pastoral goals of the Apostolic Exhortation *Africa's Commitment* into concrete actions in daily life on the local, grassroots level. This vision is seen in Number 10 that "calls for 'transforming theology into pastoral care, namely into a very concrete pastoral ministry.'" A concrete example is how SCCs can participate in reconciliation on the grassroots as the pope recommends in Number 157:

In order to encourage reconciliation in communities, I heartily recommend, as did the Synod Fathers, that each country celebrate yearly "a day or week of reconciliation, particularly during Advent or Lent". SECAM will be able to help bring this about and, in accord with the Holy See, promote a continent-wide *Year of Reconciliation* to beg of God special forgiveness for all the evils and injuries mutually inflicted in Africa, and for the reconciliation of persons and groups who have been hurt in the Church and in the whole of society. This would be an extraordinary Jubilee Year "during which the Church in Africa and in the neighboring islands gives thanks with the universal Church and implores the gifts of the Holy Spirit," especially the gift of reconciliation, justice and peace.

One of the first critiques of *Africa's Commitment* came from American missionary and writer Father Peter Henriot, SJ presently serving in Malawi:

From my own pastoral experience in Africa during the past two decades, I would have expected more discussion of the role of Small Christian Communities (SCCs), and both local and national Justice and Peace Commissions. The SCCs are mentioned in passing in four places and Justice and Peace Commissions only once in relationship to civic education and electoral process. Yet surely these two bodies are of critical importance to the specific promotion of reconciliation, justice and peace.²⁴²

²⁴¹ *Vatican Information Service*, Number 203, 20 November, 2011, Vatican Information Service Website, retrieved on 21 November, 2011, <http://www.visnews-en.blogspot.com>.

²⁴² Peter Henriot, "Steps Forward and Back," *Tablet*, 3 December 2011, pp. 11-12.

My own evaluation is that these five references to SCCs in *Africae Munus* are significant, but do not convey the richness and depth of the seven references to SCCs in the *Propositions* that are cited earlier. The Apostolic Exhortation is “lighter” compared to the meatier, more substantive *Propositions* on SCCs.

Still there are many opportunities for the African SCCs to take the initiative in implementing the recommendations of the Second African Synod on the local level in the year 2013 and beyond. This implementation includes drawing on all the official documents of the synod including the very specific *Propositions*. This includes working closely with Justice and Peace Commissions on the regional, national and parish levels.²⁴³

One example is the growing influence of Protestant fundamentalists and Pentecostals²⁴⁴ especially through aggressive sects that has been discussed during various AMECEA-level Meetings in the past three years. Number 157 of *Africa's Commitment* states:

Various syncretistic movements and sects have sprung up in Africa in recent decades. Sometimes it is hard to discern whether they are of authentically Christian inspiration or whether they are simply the fruit of sudden infatuation with a leader claiming to have exceptional gifts. Their nomenclature and vocabulary easily give rise to confusion, and they can lead people in good faith astray. These many sects take advantage of an incomplete social infrastructure, the erosion of traditional family solidarity and inadequate catechesis in order to exploit people's credulity, and they offer a religious veneer to a variety of heterodox, non-Christian²⁴⁵ beliefs. They shatter the

²⁴³ One example from Nigeria in West Africa is this report: “23 parishes and over 200 leaders and facilitators were in attendance during yesterday's Lagos Archdiocesan SCC Workshop at Holy Cross Cathedral, Lagos. Issues of justice, forgiveness and reconciliation were examined based on *Africae Munus*. The mid-year evaluation of SCC activities also came up.” Nigerian layman Raphael Okusaga in a post on the SCCs Facebook Page dated 8 July, 2012.

²⁴⁴ The Pentecostal Churches in Africa have gone through various historical stages. Thus the use of terms such as “Classical Pentecostalism” and “Neo-Pentecostalism” (that is dramatically increasing in Eastern Africa today).

²⁴⁵ As we move toward more inclusive, ecumenical, neutral and even politically correct language, terms that begin with “non” should to be avoided. “Those who are not Christian” is better than “non-Christian.” “Those who are not Catholic” is better than “non-Catholic.” Referring to a member of a Protestant denomination like Episcopalian (Anglican), Lutheran or Presbyterian as “A baptized person who is not a Catholic” is better than “A baptized person who is a non-Catholic.” Certainly Catholics do not like to be called “non” anything: Non-Muslim. Non-Jewish. Non-ordained. We should extend this courtesy to others. Also we should not make the Catholic Church the reference point for describing everyone else. Similar expression such as non-Western should be avoided too. More and more we realize that language and semantics carries a lot of baggage.

peace of couples and families through false prophecies and visions. They even seduce political leaders. The Church's theology and pastoral care must determine the causes of this phenomenon, not only in order to stem the hemorrhage of the faithful from the parishes to the sects, but also in order to lay the foundations of a suitable pastoral response to the attraction that these movements and sects exert. Once again, this points to the need for a profound evangelization of the African soul.

It is hoped that strong SCCs can counter the influence of these sects. Committed SCCs can give an ecclesial identity and communal support system to African Catholics to withstand the attraction of the sects. Scripture based SCCs can give African Catholics the confidence and experience to present a Catholic interpretation of the Bible. Recent research indicates that SCC members are more pro-active in using the *Bible* and quoting the *Bible* with their Pentecostal and Evangelical counterparts on the local level.²⁴⁶

This extends to many expressions having a negative, judgmental, even pejorative tone that should be avoided: (alphabetically) cohabitating, fallen-away Catholic, inactive Catholic, lapsed Catholic, living in sin, prodigal child, wayward person.

A specific term is the “nones” that refers to the “religiously unaffiliated.” In surveys many people answer “none of the above.” This term is a negation and does not reflect their spiritual longings. An enormous number of people see themselves as spiritual persons and have a spiritual hunger. In one research study about 72% of the self-identified “religiously unaffiliated” say they believe in a higher power of some sort and about 20% say they believe in the Judeo-Christian God. All this is in the context of people not identifying with/being part of the Institutional Church. Especially young people speak not of a formal, codified religion, but of religious strains, and millennials have a disenchantment with Christian organized religion.

A related issue is how Catholic writers and speakers use the expression/term “the church” as though we Catholics have the market on that term. Other Christian denominations fault us on this. My recommendation is to use expression/term “the Catholic Church” the first time and then the context of an article, book or speech carries the other times that just “the church” is used.

²⁴⁶ There is a similar, and even more dramatic, situation in Latin America where the influence of Protestant fundamentalists and Pentecostals including aggressive sects is much greater. *Tablet* reports: “A DEBATE has flared in the Brazilian Church over how to respond to the increasing popularity of Pentecostal churches in the mainly Catholic country, writes Francis McDonagh. At the April [2013] meeting of the bishops’ conference it was suggested that base communities, small church groups in poor communities that try to relate the Gospel to day-to-day problems, might be the best way of countering the drift of Catholics to Pentecostalism.

One of Brazil’s most famous priests, Fr. Marcello Rossi, a successful gospel singer whose masses draw huge congregations, told the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*: “I think the base communities are important, but these days our people need big spaces. The Protestants are building big centers because that brings people in. If you stay locked up in a base community, you forget about prayer and just do politics.” 4 May, 2013, p. 25.

A SCCs Workshop on “How Small Christian Communities in Africa Receive²⁴⁷ and Implement Magisterial Documents with a Special Emphasis on *Africae Munus* and its Themes of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace” took place in Karen, Nairobi, Kenya on 24-30 September, 2012. It was organized by SECAM in collaboration with AMECEA and sponsored by Missio, Aachen, Germany.

It was the first inclusive and comprehensive African continental SCCs Meeting ever held²⁴⁸ and included 45 participants (priests, religious and laity) from English-speaking, French-speaking and Portuguese speaking Africa. There were 20 delegates from the AMECEA Region, 14 men and six women. Participants formed seven small groups (similar to SCCs) for prayer, *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* and discussion: four English-speaking SCCs, two French-speaking SCCs and one Portuguese speaking SCC.

In his opening address Ugandan Archbishop Emmanuel Obbo of Tororo Archdiocese Diocese, Uganda and Vice Chairman of AMECEA, urged the Catholic Church in Africa to prioritize the pastoral program of Small Christian Communities (SCCs). He said that this would assist the Local Church to receive and implement official church documents effectively. He said:

It is therefore not a surprise that two special assemblies for Africa of the Synod of Bishops and their post-Synodal Exhortations, namely: *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995) and *Africae Munus* (2011) challenged SCCs to be in the forefront – SCC members to be agents of reconciliation, justice and peace and the SCCs themselves to be both paths to reconciliation and places of reconciliation.²⁴⁹

Bishop Obbo pointed that some of the SCCs were simply prayer groups. “The time has come for SCCs to be elevated to serious *foras* for serious Church discourses such as

²⁴⁷ For a full explanation of the meaning of “Reception” see Footnote 169.

²⁴⁸ After living 48 years in Africa I feel the greatest challenge and hardest task is to get an idea, project, activity, etc. working successfully, self-reliantly and permanently on the local, grassroots level – without it being just a “pilot project” or “experimental.” Related to this is coordinate meetings and workshops on the national and continental levels in which SCC members from the local, grassroots level actively participate. This requires huge amounts of time, energy and creativity regarding different languages, customs, travel arrangements, currencies, etc. For people who have not traveled outside their home area there is a wonderful African proverb *A coconut shell filled with water is like an ocean to an ant.*

²⁴⁹ “AFRICA: Prioritize SCCs Bishop Urges Church,” *Catholic Information Service for Africa (CISA) Email News Bulletin*. Issue No. 76, Friday, 28 September, 2012. Available in email message dated 28 September, 2012 and online on the CISA Website, retrieved on 12 October, 2012, <http://a4a0g.s18.it/f/rnl.aspx/?fgc=wwsrx.fdh=n5dd0=tw25a1cc=008&x=pv&7:8j&x=cc&0f:33idNCLM>

interpreting and implementing church documents,”²⁵⁰ he emphasized. He added that SCCs have been hailed as a new way of being the Church in Africa.

On the “Historical Backgrounds of SCCs” the official workshop report stated:

In groups based on their home regions, the delegates discussed and presented historical backgrounds, structures, challenges, success and level of participation of their SCCs. They all appreciated and acknowledged the uniqueness and particularity of the origins and historical backgrounds of SCCs in all the regions. Similarly various regions have variant SCCs structures that are determined by locations, issues and the particular people. From the presentations, it clearly came out that SCCs structures are also different and they should be determined by the Episcopal Conferences of particular countries.²⁵¹

On the question of the place of the Word of God in the life and mission of these communities, Father Yves-Lucien Evaga Ndjana, Director of BICAM, proposed a paradigm shift of the primitive community of the apostolic era (*Acts of the Apostles* 2: 42-47). He emphasized the desire for unity, love in the Lord, Jesus Christ’s prayer life and fraternal charity and his mission in the Gospel. The Word of God thus appeared as the essence, the heart and the dynamics of the whole ecclesial basic constitution: it is the Word of God that is born, lives and feeds. A Small Christian Community without the Word of God is only a human association, pretence among many others!²⁵²

Recommendations of the workshop were:

- Create a permanent consultative structure for Regional Pastoral Coordinators at the continental level who would help animate SCCs.
- Learn how to integrate SCCs in church movements like the International Young Catholic Students ((IYCS).

One creative idea is to encourage SCCs as Fellowship Groups in the workplace and business establishments. These SCCs can be for Catholics only or can be ecumenical. For example, Catholics in the Bank of Uganda in Lusaka, Zambia have a SCC for prayer, rosary and *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* that meets weekly during the lunch break.²⁵³

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ “Post Workshop Report: Workshop on How Small Christian Communities in Africa Receive and Implement Magisterial Documents,” St. Joseph’s Spiritual Center, Karen, Nairobi, Kenya, 24-30 September, 2012. Supported by Missio, SECAM and AMECEA, Accra and Nairobi: Privately Printed, 2014, p. 7.

²⁵² BICAM -- CEBAM Webiste, retrived on 26 February, 2015, <http://www.bicam-cebam.org/newsinfo.php?id=58&lang=en>

²⁵³ Febian Pikiti in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya, 18 January, 2013.

SCCs continue to be an important part of the “Pastoral Guidelines” of dioceses in Eastern Africa.

The 2013 guidelines of Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya contain eight chapters. Chapter 2 is on SCCs with sections on “Introduction,” “Description of Terms,” “Composition,” “Function of SCCs Leaders,” “Recommendations,” and “Qualities of Lay Leaders.” It states: “All Christian faithful in the Archdiocese of Nairobi should be members of SCCs.”²⁵⁴

Lusaka Archdiocese, Zambia has the overall pastoral theme “Called to Be Family of God” in its Five Year Plan (2012-2016). The Year Three (2014) Goal is: “A Year of Re-commitment to the Service of the Church and Adherence to Her Teachings at All Levels.” Objective 2 is: “Ongoing formation at all levels of the church structure on Catholic doctrine and the role/purpose of SCCs in the mission of the church.”

The Catholic Church in Eastern Africa continues to respond to the contemporary signs of the times. This includes establishing SCCs in Refugee Camps and camps of Internal Displaced People (IDPs). Often the SCCs are part of a parish established in the camps.

The first Case Study is Ngara District in Kagera Region that hosted two refugee settlements (mainly refugees of the Hutu Ethnic Group from Burundi) known as Lukole A and B in northwestern Tanzania. Orobator explains:

The Christian community is organized into seven outstations located in different sections of the camp. Together the outstations make up the refugee “parish.” These outstations are further divided into Small Christian Communities. Each community is run by a team of four people (a man, a woman, a boy and a girl). A total of forty refugee catechists collaborate with the team. According to the chief catechist, Juvenal Niboye, “the SCCs are responsible for the growth and development of the church in the camps”...The SCCs of Lukole regularly identified needier refugees, to whom they offered food and wood for fuel.²⁵⁵

A second Case Study is the Rhino Refugee Camp in Uganda where the Refugee Christian Community “regularly teamed up to cultivate the farms belonging to refugees who had become incapacitated or were elderly.”²⁵⁶

A third Case Study is Lodwar Diocese in northwestern Kenya that opened Holy Cross Parish in Kakuma Refugee Camp. It treats the parish and its pastoral team as any one of the 17 other parishes in the diocese as described as follows:

The 10 major chapels (like outstations) in the parish are divided into 26 Small Christian Communities. This makes pastoral administration, prayer, charitable activities and conflict resolutions easy for the pastors and all

²⁵⁴ *Pastoral Guidelines for the Archdiocese of Nairobi 2013*, Nairobi: Archdiocese of Nairobi, 2013, page 17.

²⁵⁵ Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos*, pp., 149, 196.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

commissions involved in the pastoral work in the Camp. Daily services are held in these SCCs... A system has been created whereby needy refugees approach the leaders of the SCCs of the chapels. They are then referred to somebody in the Justice and Peace Commission. A lot of problems can be solved at this level. Others are referred to existing NGOs in the Camp, i.e. Lutheran World Federation, World Vision or the Jesuit Refugee Service. The Catholic faithful are refugees from Sudan, DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, and Somalia.²⁵⁷

Another contemporary response is the pastoral concern and care of single Catholic mothers through the SCCs. Their number has increased dramatically especially in big cities such as Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. When these mothers ask for Baptism of their infants, some SCCs first choose a responsible wife and mother in the SCC to “accompany” the single mother – to explain her responsibilities in raising a child a Catholic and other formation and education issues. The SCC member is called the accompanier/the person who accompanies in this Ministry of Pastoral Accompaniment.²⁵⁸

Then the endorsement of the SCC is sent to the parish before the child is accepted for Baptism. Many of these single mothers are fervent Catholics. Especially in the economically

²⁵⁷ Report of Father Frans Thoolen, SMA, Official of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Vatican Website, retrieved on 7 March, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/pom2003_91/rc_pc_migrants_pom91_Thoolen.html

²⁵⁸ There are many varieties and forms of Accompaniment. Spiritual Accompaniment is common in spiritual direction, spiritual guidance and spiritual discernment. Mission as accompaniment: “While the use of the term ‘accompaniment’ as a model of missionary practice is relatively new...the spirituality and practice of accompaniment, ‘walking with,’ can affect a transformation...the lived spirituality of accompaniment is grounded in the very life of Jesus.” Claude Barbour and Eleanor Doidge, “Mission as Accompaniment” in Stephen Bevans, (ed.), *A Century of Catholic Mission*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock. 2013.

Qualities of Accompaniment/Accompanying include:

- Walking with/Walking along side of
- Start where people are at
- Listening
- Asking questions
- Supporting/Affirming
- Loving presence
- Solidarity
- Compassion
- Advanced Empathy
- Advising/Guiding
- Challenging
- Empowering/Empowerment
- Transforming

poor areas of big cities such as Nairobi (slums, shanty towns, informal settlements, etc.) they are the leaders of their SCCs.²⁵⁹

Retired Bishop Colin Davies (died in 2017) provides an interesting summary of this 1961 to 2012 period. Along with retired Ugandan Archbishop James Odongo, Archbishop Emeritus of Tororo Archdiocese, Uganda (died in 2020) and retired Tanzanian Bishop Gervase Nkalanga, formerly of Bukoba Diocese, Tanzania (died in 2015), Davies was one of the last three bishops in the AMECEA Region who participated in the Second Vatican Council in Rome. In a wide ranging interview²⁶⁰ he recalled how SCCs are the fruit of Vatican II Ecclesiology. The discovery of Small Christian Communities in the AMECEA countries in the 1970s “was a marvelous novelty that has made the church grow.” He singled out the vibrant church at the SCC level as the greatest mark of ecclesial development on the African continent. Davies also participated in the First African Synod in Rome in 1994 and has witnessed how SCCs have developed as an inculturated model of church from the grassroots.

Magesa adds:

It is in the Eastern African ecclesiastical region (known as AMECEA, acronym for the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa), perhaps more than anywhere else in the Catholic world, where, for

²⁵⁹ The 17 August, 2013 issue of the *Tablet* has a powerful article by Paul Vallely: “How Life in the Slums Changed the Pope.” “As leader of Argentina’s Jesuits, Jorge Mario Bergoglio was a staunch conservative. Now, as Pope Francis, he has put caring for the poor at the heart of his ministry. Here, in a second extract from a new book, the writer traces Bergoglio’s spiritual transformation.” <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/article/164557>

The description of the slums in Buenos Aires is similar to Nairobi and other big African cities: “Regular contact with the poorest of the poor in the Buenos Aires slums played a part. There, Bergoglio learned to see the world differently, said Fr. Augusto Zampini, a diocesan priest from Greater Buenos Aires who has taught at the Colegio Maximo. ‘When you’re working in a shanty town, 90 per cent of your congregation are single or divorced. You have to learn to deal with that Communion for the divorced and remarried is not an issue. Everyone takes Communion’” (page 6).

The Argentinian experience of CEBs has many parallels to Eastern Africa SCCs. “What shines through all this change is that Bergoglio is a pragmatist rather than an ideologue. As provincial in the 1970s, he was severe in his instructions to his Jesuits that they must serve only in parishes and not in Liberation Theology’s smaller, bottom-up base communities, where laymen and women took the place of priests and the poor learned to read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Yet, as archbishop, he reversed this attitude, giving the exact opposite instructions. ‘If you can, rent a garage and find some willing layman, let him go there, do a little catechesis, and even give Communion,’ he told his priests. ‘He was also concerned with getting the laity active,’ said his aide Federico Wals, ‘and letting them take charge.’ He wanted it to become a permanent feature of the Church that its mission should not depend on whoever happened to be in charge at any given time” (page 7).

²⁶⁰ Colin Davies in an interview with the author in Nairobi, Kenya, 24 March, 2012.

close to half-century now, there has been a formal, conscious, deliberate, and extensive ecclesial and ecclesiological effort to promote and sustain SCCs as a foundation of evangelization. Which means that, in Africa, SCCs have not only been a theoretical idea but a practical mission of the church; here SCCs have enjoyed not only theological elaboration and endorsement, but concrete pastoral application.

What, therefore, has come from Africa in the form of SCCs is a blessing of the Holy Spirit to and for the church worldwide. The full potential of community called church in its evangelizing or liberating role can only be realizable if evangelization takes place in SCCs. This is where the pragmatic work of justice, reconciliation, and peace can be fashioned, informed by that supreme joy that can be found only in the Gospel, the good news, of Jesus our Ancestor. SCCs are the way of being church.²⁶¹

Pope Francis promulgated *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)* in Rome on 26 November, 2013 to close the Year of Faith. This is the Apostolic Exhortation on the meeting of the Synod of Bishops on *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* in October, 2012. SCCs are emphasized in relation to the parish in Nos. 29-30 with the key sections in **bold**:

The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and **missionary creativity of the pastor and the community**. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if it proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialog, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.²⁶² In all its activities **the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers**. It is a **community of communities**, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a **center of constant missionary outreach**. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them **completely mission-oriented**.

Other Church institutions, **basic communities and small communities, movements, and forms of association are a source of**

²⁶¹ Laurenti Magesa, "The Joy of Community," p. 22.

²⁶² Footnote 27 states that this section draws on *Proposition 26* on "Parishes and Other Ecclesial Realities" under "Pastoral Responses to the Circumstances of Our Day" of the 2011 World Synod of Bishops on "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith."

enrichment for the Church, raised up by the Spirit for evangelizing different areas and sectors. Frequently they bring a new evangelizing fervor and a new capacity for dialog with the world whereby the Church is renewed. But it will prove beneficial for them not to lose contact with the rich reality of the local parish and to participate readily in the overall pastoral activity of the Particular Church.²⁶³ This kind of integration²⁶⁴ will prevent them from concentrating only on part of the Gospel or the Church, or becoming nomads without roots.

Archbishop Hubertus van Megen, the then Charge D'affaires to Malawi, said that is striking that the pope devotes a lot of space in the apostolic exhortation to the important of the parish in pastoral ministry, evangelization and mission.²⁶⁵ This "community of communities" (or "communion of communities") ecclesiology is fundamental to how SCCs are a new model of church in Eastern Africa today. The parish is indeed a communion of SCCs. It is significant that the pope distinguishes "basic communities" that are best known in Latin American with the more widely used name "small communities." These SCCs actively participate in evangelization.

The Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM) prepared the AMECEA 18th Plenary Assembly on the theme "New Evangelization through True Conversion and Witnessing to Christian Faith" that took place in Lilongwe, Malawi from 16 to 26 July, 2014. In terms of fund raising, Malawian ECM Secretary General Father George Buleya explained that all were involved from diocesan level to the parish level to Small Christian Community level down to the family level and a lot of enthusiasm was shown. He said: "Our Christians were highly involved; they felt the ownership of the event and were willing to support it the best they can."²⁶⁶

During a meeting of 31 SCCs leaders (18 women and 11 men) in Kachebere Parish in Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi on 12 December, 2013 I experienced this enthusiasm myself. These simple farmers and housewives in a rural parish were well aware of the coming AMECEA Meeting. They explained that each Catholic contributes 50 Malawian Kwacha to his or her SCC treasurer. This money is forwarded to the Parish Finance Committee and then to the Lilongwe Archdiocese Account for the preparations of the meeting.

²⁶³ Footnote 29, *ibid*.

²⁶⁴ An excellent example of integration is the website of the Office of Evangelization, Small Christian Communities and Adult Faith Formation in the Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida, USA. It has many SCC Resources. <http://dosp.org/evangelization>

²⁶⁵ Hubertus van Megen in a conversation with the author, Lilongwe, Malawi on 16 December, 2013.

²⁶⁶ George Buleya in "MALAWI: ECM is Set for the 18th AMECEA Plenary Assembly," *AMECEA Latest News*, 25 October, 2013, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 27 October, 2013 http://amecea.blogspot.com/2013/10/malawi-ecm-is-set-for-18thamecea.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+AmeceaNews+%28AMECEA+NEWS+BLOG%29

One of the topics of reflection during the study session of the AMECEA Plenary was: “New Evangelization as an Opportunity to Work towards True Conversion and Witness to Christian Faith (Emphasis on the Role of Family Life and Small Christian Communities).”

In preparation for the plenary, the AMECEA Pastoral Department²⁶⁷ prepared “The Logical Strategic Framework for the Revitalization and Strengthening of SCCs as a Way of Being Church as Family in the AMECEA Region” (April, 2014 – March, 2017). It provides a kind of road map for the implementation of this important area of pastoral priority as enshrined in the Ten-Year AMECEA Strategic Plan (2014 – 2024). It emphasizes four main activities:

1. Promoting SCCs Formation Teams.
2. Promoting Youth SCCs (Parish/Learning Institutions)
3. Promoting Resource Material for Sharing in SCCs.
4. Promoting SCCs and Faith-sharing Interactions using the Electronic Media.²⁶⁸

Kenyan diocesan priest Father Ferdinand Lugonzo, the Secretary General of AMECEA, said: “When you look at the broader theme for this AMECEA Plenary, two institutions are crucial: the apostolate of family and its contribution to the work of evangelization and the Small Christian Communities which is a brain child of AMECEA.” He said that the delegates reviewed and reflected on Small Christian Communities to see how effective they are and what gaps and challenges they are facing and proposed what can be done to make them [more] effective means of evangelization.

A special feature of the plenary was on Sunday, 20 July 2014 when the AMECEA delegates took a break from their study sessions and made pastoral solidarity visits to various parish communities in Lilongwe. For example at St. Francis Parish (Kanengo), the 25 Tanzanian delegates comprised of 21 Bishops, two priests and 2 lay faithful were warmly received by thousands of Christians. The liturgy, animated with traditional Malawian hymns and dances, was presided over by Tanzanian Bishop Tarcisius Ngalalekumtwa, Bishop of Iringa and President of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference. In his homily the Archbishop of Arusha, Tanzanian Archbishop Josephat Lebulu said that the Risen Christ through the Holy Spirit is working with the AMECEA Church all the time and that is why the inspiration made by the AMECEA Church in instituting the Small Christian Communities is desired by churches in other parts of the world as an effective strategy for evangelization.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁷ It has been pointed out that the Pastoral Department is the “heartbeat” or “lung” of AMECEA. The mission of AMECEA is essentially pastoral.

²⁶⁸ “The Logical Strategic Framework for the Revitalization and Strengthening of SCCs as a Way of Being Church as Family in the AMECEA Region (April, 2014 – March, 2017),” Nairobi: AMECEA Secretariat, Unpublished Article, 2014, pp. 2-4.

²⁶⁹ Adapted from Philip Odii, “Malawi: AMECEA Delegates Visit Parish Communities in Lilongwe Archdiocese,” *AMECEA Online Newsletter* Special Plenary Assembly Issue 005, 21 July, 2014, retrieved on 24 July, 2014, http://amecea.blogspot.com/2014/07/malawi-amecea-delegates-visit-parish.html?utm_source=AMECEA+Newsletter&utm_campaign=a6dbddd43-AMECEA+Online+Newsletter+6+5+2013&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_85fa866553-a6dbddd43-67462977

The “Communiqué of the 18th AMECEA Plenary Assembly in Lilongwe, Malawi (16th to 26th July, 2014)” under “New Evangelization to Address New Challenges” stated:

We endeavour to deepen evangelization and employ various methodologies to ensure true catechesis, true conversion, true spirituality and true witness to Christian faith in AMECEA region and beyond. We encourage all Catholics to participate actively in Small Christian Communities. As shepherds we commit ourselves to ensuring that Small Christian Communities continue being places for the true experience of faith.

“Place” is a key word here. Over the past 10 years Catholic Church documents at all levels have emphasized that the SCC (the church in the local neighborhood) is the actual place or physical location/setting where the following happen (in alphabetical order): *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection*, communion, conversion, counselling, deeper evangelization, family catechesis, family life apostolate, formation, friendships, healing, justice and peace, marriage catechesis, mercy, mutual support, new evangelization, pastoral care, prayer, reconciliation, relationships, religious education, school of faith, service, shaping Christian consciences, training, transformation, unity and witness.

The AMECEA Countries prepared for the III Extraordinary World Synod of Bishops on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization," that took place in Rome from 5-19 October, 2014. This October, 2014 III Extraordinary World Synod of Bishops “defined” the “*status quaestionis*” (Latin for “state of the question”) of the topic of the family and marriage. Then the next synod – officially called the Synod of Bishops XIV Ordinary General Assembly -- to take place in Rome in October, 2015 -- will “seek working guidelines in the pastoral care of the person and the family.”

This connects with many AMECEA dioceses that are celebrating 2014 as “The Year of the Family.” This flows into the World Meeting of Families on the theme “Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive” to take place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA from 22-27 September, 2015.

Hopefully Eastern African SCCs can be involved in this whole process. More information and examples can be found in Chapter 13 on “SCCs Promote Family and Marriage Ministry in Eastern Africa.”

The 50th Anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council was on 8 December, 2015. With many books and articles being written and conferences held, the “Reception of Vatican II” was widely discussed.²⁷⁰ This was an opportunity to revisit Catholic Church

²⁷⁰ “Reception” of a document or teaching in the Catholic Church is a rich and meaningful word in term of its theological and pastoral implications. "Reception" has been understood as one of the *munera*, or gifts, of the church from its beginning. This gift is exercised by the People of God who constitute the church and is given to the everyday Catholics who express the *sensus fidei fidelium* and the *sensus fidei*. Reception is a gift through which the sense of the faith of the faithful is authoritatively expressed. Reception is the foundation of the sense of the faith and of the faithful community. Recognition by reception is a form of consensus formation in a church that understands itself as a community of Local Churches. While we may have many good ideas and intentions in the communications process, ultimately it is the

history in Africa and to learn from the past 50 years. From the perspective of SCCs in Eastern Africa we are rediscovering the importance of two of the founders -- Kalilombe and Mwoleka. Their vision of the theology and praxis of Vatican II's Communion Ecclesiology helped create the path for the establishment and development of Eastern African SCCs. Other key people were Ndingi and McCauley.

The new Cardinal for Rwanda, Cardinal Antoine Kambanda the first-ever Cardinal in the landlocked Great Rift Valley East African nation, will continue to prioritize family apostolate in what he considers the rebuilding of "internal structures" that the country requires. In an interview with EWTN News Nightly on Monday, November 30 following the November 28 consistory, Cardinal Kambanda describes the family as "the domestic church" and "foundation of the society." Cardinal Kambanda said that he will continue to spearhead "the efforts to rebuild the internal structures (and) relationships, especially the family."

His message about prioritizing family apostolate is in line with his promotion of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as a way of being church in Rwanda. "May all our SCCs celebrate that we have a new cardinal in Africa: Cardinal-elect Antoine Kambanda, the Archbishop of Kigali, Rwanda. He is a big supporter of the SCC Model of Church. He emphasizes SCC Formation and Grassroots Evangelism," Father Joseph Healey, a member of the Maryknoll Society who is a specialist expert on SCCs posted on his Facebook page on 25 October, 2020 the day Pope Francis named the 13 new Cardinals. "He sent a Rwandese diocesan priest to Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya to study for a Master's degree in Pastoral Theology with specialization in SCCs."

"receiver" who decides what is received and how it is acted upon. Some meanings/responses (alphabetically):

acceptance
 adherence
 agreement
 assent
 attentiveness
 deny assent
 disagreement
 endorsement
 indifference
 irrelevance
 obedience
 rejection

Summary of Eugene Cullen Kennedy, "Can Catholics Disagree Only When They Agree With the Church?" *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, 30 July 2014, National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved 15 August, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/bulletins-human-side/new-sensus-fidei-document-can-catholics-disagree-only-when-they-agree>

An important document is John Henry Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful on Matters of Doctrine* (1859).

89-year-old Archbishop James Odongo, Archbishop Emeritus of the Catholic Archdiocese of Tororo, Uganda died on 4 December, 2020 at St. Francis Nsambya Hospital in Kampala, Uganda. The then Bishop Odongo was Chairperson of AMECEA from 1973-1979. The SCCs Model of Church was established as a key pastoral priority at the 1973 and 1976 AMECEA Plenaries. Odongo is considered one of the founding fathers of SCCs in the AMECEA countries and promoted the importance of SCCs everywhere.

The 2021 – 2024 Synodal Process in the Catholic Church introduced a new chapter in the history of SCCs in Eastern Africa. **ADD**

NOTE: This first historical chapter covers 1961 to 2024. It is “a work in progress.” This particular chapter focuses on the 1973 to 1979 period to highlight the origin of the SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa. The great advantage of online writing is that you can edit, change and add as you go along. I am writing this SCCs History Chapter as a “participant historian.” Professional historians say that you cannot write accurate “critical history” about the recent past. You have to wait to let time take its course, specifically 25 years later. So for the last 25 years the facts are presented, but the interpretation and the “critical history” part will be incomplete.

2. Quantitative Evaluation of the Growth of SCCs in the AMECEA Region

We have a good overall picture. Today there are over 195,000 Small Christian Communities in the nine AMECEA countries in Eastern Africa. But there is a gap. Five countries (Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia) have extensive statistics. For example, Tanzania alone has over 60,000 SCCs and Kenya alone has over 50,000 SCCs. Many dioceses and parishes in Eastern Africa have detailed statistics on the names and number of SCCs. The best source are the detailed annual statistics that each diocese sends to the Vatican. For example, in the report Archdiocese of Nairobi Annual Returns from 1 January 2013 to 31 December 2013 one question under “Total Parish” is: “Number of *Jumuiyas*: These statistics are also used as part of the bishop’s every five-year report during his *Ad Limina* visit.

The Pastoral Department of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC)²⁷¹ has compiled statistics on the number of SCCs in 22 of the 34 dioceses in the country as of 2013. The total is 45,491 SCCs with the leading dioceses as follows:

- 5,837 SCCs: Moshi Diocese.
- 5,823 SCCs: Morogoro Diocese.
- 3,682 SCCs: Shinyanga Diocese.
- 3,040 SCCs: Dar es Salaam Archdiocese.
- 2,860 SCCs: Rulenge-Ngara Diocese.
- 2,738 SCCs: Njombe Diocese.
- 2,731 SCCs: Iringa Diocese.
- 2,700 SCCs: Mbulu Diocese.

If all the dioceses are included it is estimated that there are over 60,000 SCCs in the whole of Tanzania.

When I left Dar es Salaam Archdiocese in January, 2007 it had 49 parishes. As of 31 December, 2011 Dar es Salaam Archdiocese had 3,040 SCCs in its 67 parishes. As of 31 August, 2018 Dar es Salaam Archdiocese had 5,555 SCCs in its 111 parishes (based on approximately 50 SCCs each in the 111 parishes). The number is higher if you include SCCs in schools.

As of 15 June, 2012 Nairobi Archdiocese had 4,537 SCCs in its 103 parishes and 12 chaplaincies.²⁷² As of 15 June, 2012 Homa Bay Diocese, Kenya had 3,200 SCCs. As of 31 December, 2013 Ngong Diocese, Kenya had “at least” 1,080 SCCs.

²⁷¹ Each of the national episcopal conferences in the AMECEA Region has its own structure depending on the number of dioceses. Normally SCCs fall under the Pastoral Department that includes the Lay Apostolate, Youth Apostolate and Family Life Apostolate. TEC with 34 dioceses has separate departments for these apostolates. In actual practice SCCs link to all of them.

²⁷² “Today there are 2,891,359 Catholics in the Archdiocese of Nairobi with ever increasing vocations to the priesthood and religious life. Small Christian Communities and Schools of Evangelization for the training of clergy and laity are springing up everywhere.” *There is Nothing I Cannot Do in Christ Who Strengths Me (Philippians 4:13). This is the Time for*

Another useful source are the Catholic Directories that are published on the AMECEA Level, the national level and the diocesan level. The *Kenya Catholic Directory 2006* is a goldmine of statistics. "This allows us to estimate that there is an average of 45 SCCs per parish, and therefore over 33,000 of them in the country."²⁷³

A Case Study of one diocese shows the evolving pattern. It was estimated that in 2006 Machakos Diocese had over 4,000 SCCs, the most SCCs in Kenya followed by Nairobi Archdiocese. Our new research and statistics shows this has increased to over 5,000 SCCs. Kenyan Apostle of Jesus Father Patrick Nzao,²⁷⁴ the Pastor of Our Lady of Calvary Parish, Kibwezi, said the number has risen because of the increase of SCCs in the subparishes and outstations. In a meeting on 4 October, 2011 near Kibwezi nine SCC members of St. Cecilia SCC in St. Peter's Parish, Makindu (that has 96 SCCs) said that two of the reasons for the high numbers are the foundation of the Catholic faith is very strong in the diocese and hardships such as famine and little rainfall have strengthened the local Catholic people's resolve and commitment. Kenyan layman Alphonse Omolo, one of the guest participants in the meeting, emphasized: "SCCs are the vehicles for peace and reconciliation in the Catholic Church and the entire society. We all need to work for reconciliation and peace starting in our families so that we can inspire the ripple effect or radiation of such peace and reconciliation throughout our neighborhood and the wider society."

More and more up-to-date statistics are available on the internet without being printed in book or booklet form. This includes online directories such as the *AMECEA Directory* <http://www.amecea.org/index.php/amecea-directory-main>.

The other four countries (Eritrea,²⁷⁵ Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan) have few statistics. The AMECEA Secretariat in Nairobi welcomes up-to-date statistics from all nine AMECEA countries especially Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan.²⁷⁶

These statistics have to be seen against the background of the growth of the Catholic Church in Africa, and in Eastern Africa in particular, and the terrific expansion of Christianity in Africa – the fastest growing continent in history. It is clear from the available data that the center of gravity of Christianity is shifting dramatically from north to south, that

Faith and Self-Reliance. Pastoral Letter of H.E. John Cardinal Njue, Archdiocese of Nairobi Family Day 2012, Nairobi: Privately Printed, 2012, p. 12.

²⁷³ In Aloysius, "Discovering God's Marvels: Facts & Curiosities about the *Kenya Catholic Directory 2006*," *Seed* 18:7-8 (July-August, 2006), pp. 10-11.

²⁷⁴ Patrick Nzao in a conversation with the author in Kibwezi, Kenya on 2 June, 2012.

²⁷⁵ I asked the Catholic Relief Services (CRS) representative in Eritrea how the SCC pastoral priority is being carried out. He answered with the grim words: "In Eritrea our only priority is survival."

²⁷⁶ It is noteworthy that no AMECEA Plenary Assembly has yet taken place in any of these four countries. The main reason is that there are communications and travel problems between Ethiopia and Eritrea and between South Sudan and Sudan. Perhaps the Chairman of AMECEA can be elected from one of these four countries.

is, from Europe and North America to Africa, Asia and Latin America." According to American religious sociologist Philip Jenkins, there will be one billion Christians in Africa by 2050.

In 1900 just twenty-five percent of the 266 million Catholics in the world lived in Africa, Asia and Latin America; by 2000, sixty-six percent of 1.1 billion Catholics lived in the Global South, and by 2050, the Southern share is projected to be seventy-five percent, or three quarters of all the Catholics on the planet. That's perhaps the most rapid, most sweeping, transformation of the Catholic population in more than 2,000 years of history.

American journalist Barb Frazee reports:

The Catholic Church is growing by leaps and bounds in and Tanzania, as it is throughout the continent of Africa. Since Pope John Paul II became pope in 1978, the number of Catholics in Africa has increased by nearly 150 percent to 137.5 million. Some church leaders attribute the growth to development of the concept of Small Christian Communities, parish-based groups that meet to pray, study Scripture and help others.²⁷⁷

Estimates on the number of Catholics in Africa vary. Wikipedia says that there are 135 million Catholics in Africa and 40 million Catholics in the nine countries of Eastern Africa.²⁷⁸ Other estimates go up to 185 million.

Based on the *Church Book of Statistics* updated 31 December, 2011 Kenyan diocesan priest Father Don Bosco Ochieng Onyalla describes the "steadily growing Catholic presence [in Africa]

Global Population: 6.9 billion
 Catholic Global Population: 1.2 billion
 African Population: 1.1 billion
 Catholic African Population: 193 million

The number of African Catholics has risen from 13.8% Catholics in Africa in 2005 to 16.2% in 2012. Africa recorded a growth of 0.35% more than the previous year compared to the world wide Catholic growth of 0.4%.²⁷⁹

According to the *2012 World Population Review* Africa has the youngest population in the world with an average age of 18 years. Forty percent of Africans (416 million people) are 14 years old or less. More than 70% of the population of East Africa is below the age of 30 with the majority being between 15 and 25 years of age. The average age in the region is

²⁷⁷ Barb Frazee, "Small Christian Communities Contribute to Growth of Church in Africa," *Catholic News Service*, 24 January, 2004, retrieved on the Catholic News Service Website at <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/stories/cns/0403501.htm> on 9 March, 2012.

²⁷⁸ "Catholic Church by Country," retrieved on Wikipedia on 17 August, 2012, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Church_by_country#Africa

²⁷⁹ "Catholic News Agency for Africa (CANAA) Strategic Plan 2014-2017," Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2014.

19 years. By 2050 one in every three children in the world will be born in Sub Saharan Africa.²⁸⁰

A United Nations forecast shows:

As of 29 July 2015 there are around 7.3 billion inhabitants on the planet. By 2030 this is expected to increase to 8.5bn and by 2050 it should be 9.7bn. The medium-variant projection for 2100 puts the world's population at 11.2bn. Africa is expected to account for more than half of the world's population growth between 2015 and 2050. Worldwide the average number of children per woman is at 2.5. In Africa, however, the number is at 4.7. Africa's share of global population is projected to grow to 25% in 2050 and 39% by 2100.²⁸¹

Orobator summarizes:

American *aficionado* of the Vatican John Allen, Jr., once remarked that "if I were asked to offer a history of Roman Catholicism in the twentieth century in one sentence, I would reply: 'The center of gravity shifted from North to South'." ²⁸² Such shift or incontrovertible evidence of religious growth in Africa is interpreted by Benedict XVI as a sign of hope for the rest of the world. Africa holds a significant piece of the future of Christianity or, crucially, the future of Christianity passes through Africa. And statistics don't lie! Take, as one example, statistics of the growth of Christianity in Africa:

- One-in-five of all the Christians in the world (21%) now lives in sub-Saharan Africa. ²⁸³
- Over a period of one hundred years Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa has recorded an astronomical 70-fold increase in membership, from 7 million to 470 million. ²⁸⁴
- Sub-Saharan Africa has more than 500 million Christians, which makes it the region with the third-largest number of Christians worldwide. Collectively, the region's 51 countries and territories are home to nearly a quarter of the world's Christians (24%). ²⁸⁵

²⁸⁰ 2012 *World Population Review*, retrieved on 28 August, 2014, <http://www.worldreview.info/content/africas-population-boom>

²⁸¹ "Analysis: Latest Population Forecasts," *Zenit: The World Seen from Rome Daily Dispatch* Email, 9 August, 2015.

²⁸² John L. Allen, *The Future Church: How Ten Trends are Revolutionizing the Catholic Church*, New York: Doubleday, 2009, p. 17.

²⁸³ The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, "Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa" (April 2010), <http://www.pewforum.org>.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Within the wider context of religious growth in Africa, Catholicism has recorded significant proportionate demographic expansion over the last one hundred years, climbing from 1,220,000, or less than 1% of the total global population of Catholics in 1910, to 171.48 million, or 16% of Catholics worldwide, in 2010.²⁸⁶ These figures show the rapid growth of Catholicism on the continent in the span of a century, a fact that recently prompted an imaginative Spanish journalist to nickname Africa “a factory of Catholic souls.”²⁸⁷

Of the spiritual riches of Africa Pope Benedict XVI stated:

When we speak of the treasures of Africa... The Word of God, instead, makes us look at another inheritance: the spiritual and cultural one of which humanity has even greater need than it does of raw materials. As Jesus said, “What gain, then, is it for anyone to win the whole world and forfeit his life?” (*Mark* 8:36). From this point of view, Africa represents an enormous spiritual lung for a humanity that appears to be in a crisis of faith and hope.²⁸⁸

This present evaluation relies on the [32 Criteria to Evaluate a Typical Small Christian Community \(SCC\) in Eastern Africa](#) (found as Appendix No. 2) that are explained as follows:

Our SCCs Research Team has established 32 criteria for evaluating²⁸⁹ a typical neighborhood parish-based Small Christian Community (SCC) in an urban, urban-rural

²⁸⁶ World Christian Database (<http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/>) and The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, “Global Christianity: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World’s Christian Population” (December 2011; corrected February 2013), <http://www.pewforum.org>.

²⁸⁷ Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, “A Billion Reasons to Believe in Africa – The Long March from ‘The Hopeless Continent’ to the ‘Spiritual Lung’ of Humanity,” *2013 Cafod Lecture*, 18 October 2013, *Tablet* Website, retrieved on 20 October, 2013, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/images/A%20billion%20reasons%20to%20believe%20in%20Africa%20Full%20Text%2018%20October%202013.pdf>

²⁸⁸ Benedict XVI, “Homily by the Holy Father,” “Solemn Inauguration of the II Special Assembly for Africa of Bishops, 4 October, 2009, retrieved from the Vatican Website on 8 May, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/news_services/press/sinodo/documents/bollettino_23_ii_speciale-africa-2009/02_inglese/b03_02.html#SOLEMN_INAUGURATION_OF_THE_II_SPECIAL_ASSEMBLY_FOR_AFRICA_OF_BISHOPS

²⁸⁹ A helpful evaluation tool or measurement tool are the six characteristics of Vital/Small Christian Communities described in Section No. 89 in Blessed John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation *The Church in Africa*.

(called peri-urban in Zambia), rural-urban or rural area in Eastern Africa.²⁹⁰ These criteria are drawn from official AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa) documents as far back as the 1973, 1976 and 1979 AMECEA Plenary Study Conferences, the First African Synod in 1994, the Second African Synod in 2009, practical pastoral decisions based on experience during this 1973-2023 period, and an evolving praxis, theology and vision of SCCs.

The first criterion has been the hardest to explain and the easiest to misunderstand: “The SCC is small -- usually not more than 15 to 20 regularly participating/attending adults (with a varying number of children).” For years many priests and other pastoral agents in Eastern Africa thought that “small” means “local.” So they equated a SCC with the local outstation (or “mission chapel” to use the language of many years ago). This could be 50-100 people and even more. This was a challenge for the Kuria Ethnic Group in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania who usually found their identity in larger groups. Over time they came to see that the outstation is the “Local Christian Community” that is composed of small groups of Christians called SCCs.

Even now in Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi the Christians are used to larger groups of 100 or 200 people especially in some rural areas that are popularly called *miphakati* (SCCs). In our evaluation we found that the key questions to ask are: Do these SCCs meet outside the Sunday Morning Mass and the “Sunday Service Without a Priest?” Is the group small enough that *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* can be done in a manageable circle where everyone can participate. Following the guideline that “there is no blueprint for building SCCs,” creativity and flexibility are needed. Lusaka Archdiocese, Zambia still has large numbers in some of their SCCs, but the members go into small groups for the *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection*. Then they all come together in one large community for the pastoral meeting or business meeting.

Now after many years of experience the meaning of a SCC is clearer. It is a small group of committed Christians most often living in the same geographical area, that is, the church in the neighborhood. A recent trend is that the number of SCC members in one particular SCC is larger to insure that enough people volunteer for the different ministries/services (described elsewhere).

Rutechura expands the meaning of neighborhood, neighborhoodness and neighborliness in the context of SCCs:

In this line of thought, Titus Amigu makes an important point that SCCs within the pastoral option of the AMECEA Bishops squared with the vision of extension or perfection of neighborliness. This neighborhood is the immediate context and field which can be rightly termed nurturing the “Church in (or of) the Neighborhood.” Witnessing to Christ’s love through SCCs is meant to be an act of living the Christian commitment of love and cementing the bonds of belonging and togetherness (See Titus Amigu,

²⁹⁰ Our research has identified two new contexts or geographical locations: First, in Lodwar and Marsabit Dioceses in Northern Kenya the places of the meetings of the SCCs of the nomadic ethnic groups change dramatically according to the climate such during the dry season and during times of famine. Second, in parts of large metropolitan dioceses such as Nairobi the locations of SCCs are also classified as urban-rural and rural-urban.

“Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo -- Small Christian Communities in Tanzania” at <http://www.c-b-t.org>).

This interplay of broadening and deepening Christian neighborhoodness and belonging within SCCs is equally emphasized in *A Catholic Catechism* (East African Version) whereby it is stated that within the African communities, the sense of community is crucial. One is understood to find fulfillment only in relation with others. There is no room for loners. This sense of belonging, if not limited to one’s own small group only, can be very beneficial in building our communion with God and with each other as a celebrating community, especially with its stress on community living and responsibility (*Catechism*, 182)...

It is this *koinonia* perspective within SCCs that has provided space of opening up gates to welcome the neighbor, bridging differences and social strata in the day to day social living, sometimes even in economic status and varied cultural backgrounds. Both ordained ministers and the religious who are practitioners of Small Christian Communities are primarily seekers of communion rather than resolving to be leaders who impose their will and authority...

In a summarized manner, SCCs have led to new ways of building Christian identity with a special touch of a new sense of belonging and bonding. We can rightly call Small Christian communities “Christian care in (or of) the neighborhood environment.”²⁹¹

Each country in the AMECEA Region has to be evaluated historically and contextually. The secession of South Sudan from Sudan in 2011 is only viewed by the Catholic Church as a political separation while the Catholic Church remains as one. To show this unity and inclusiveness, the Sudan Catholic Bishop Conference (SCBC) in August, 2013 became known as SCBC-SSS that basically translates as the Sudan Catholic Bishops Conference -- for Sudan and South Sudan.

The present two countries of South Sudan²⁹² and Sudan have had a unique history due to the many years of war, violence, political turmoil, tribalism and uprootedness. But

²⁹¹ Pius Rutechura, “Church and Authority -- Lessons and Challenges of Small Christian Communities: Focus on Dimensions of Leadership, Lay Participation, Priestly Ministry and Common Priesthood of the Faithful” in Moerschbacher, *Proceedings of the International Symposium* pp. 3-4.

²⁹² Although the Protestant Churches are not part of this research, it is interesting to note that as of September, 2011 the [Catholic] Paulines Book and Media Center in Juba in South Sudan was selling hundreds of Bibles in local African languages to leaders of the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church and the Mormon Church to use in their small cell groups in Juba.

research shows that even in heavily Muslim²⁹³ countries like Sudan, SCCs can have a special presence. Writing about the places in Africa where Missionaries of Africa serve, Richard Baawobr, MAfr states:

Even when the community is small, as happens when Christians are in a minority, it is possible, and even desirable to make use of the dynamism of Small Christian Communities in order to give vitality to the local church. I know confreres who travelled more than 600 km to go to a meeting of a Small Christian Community in a Muslim milieu. This little community radiated energy around it in spite of or maybe because of their small numbers because they were the Family of God in their locality.²⁹⁴

In the 1980s and early 1990s SCCs were numerous especially due to the outreach programs, resource materials and animation of the National and Diocesan Palica (Pastoral and Liturgical Research Center) Centers. But gradually parishes closed due to the civil war and many Christians moved to safer areas. Most pastoral programs and SCCs stopped due to the upheaval and uncertainty.

After the independence of South Sudan on 9 July, 2011 SCCs training programs made a fresh start. This meant training a new generation of Catholics in the importance, meaning and activities of SCCs. A good process used throughout the AMECEA Region in building SCCs is three stages: First, to start or set up SCCs. Second, to make the SCCs strong. Third, is to make the SCC permanent and ongoing.²⁹⁵

Already significant shifts were taking place in South Sudan. For example, at one time there were many SCCs in Sacred Heart Parish in Port Sudan in Khartoum Archdiocese in the present Republic of Sudan (the north). As thousands of Sudanese Catholics moved back to South Sudan the demographics changed dramatically. Now there are only seven SCCs in Sacred Heart Parish. These Catholic lay people used mainly Arabic in their SCCs in the north. A new challenge is to adapt to the more local ethnic group languages in the south such as Dinka, Nuer and Bari.

On 24 September, 2011 I gave a talk on “SCCs: a New Beginning in South Sudan in Real Time” during the Monthly Recollection Day for Religious and Church Personnel in Juba Archdiocese at the Comboni Missionaries House.” “Real Time” was a metaphor for starting now/today in the rebuilding and revitalization process of a newly independent South Sudan after years of an interim or transitional period. South Sudan diocesan priest Nicholas Kiri, the Director of the Palica Center in Juba Archdiocese, said: “SCCs are the most appealing

²⁹³ The words Muslim, Islam, Islamic, etc. have to be used very carefully without generalizations and stereotypes. Using clarifying adjectives such as “Fundamentalist Muslims” is important and necessary.

²⁹⁴ Richard Baawobr, “The Origins and Reasons for Small Christian Communities,” Missionaries of Africa in West Africa Website, retrieved 24 July, 2014, <http://www.mafrwestafrica.net/content/view/648/71/lang,en>

²⁹⁵ The Swahili language spoken in Eastern and Central Africa uses very effective wording for these three stages: *kuunda*, *kuimarisha* and *kudumisha*.

pastoral approach to the new way of being church in South Sudan today.” As a gesture of conscious solidarity he gave copies of the “Republic of South Sudan: One Nation from Every Tribe, Tongue and People” Prayer Card to members of my St. Kizito SCC in Nairobi.

At a symposium on the “Role of the Church in the Independence of South Sudan” in Juba, South Sudan from 13--16 October, 2011 South Sudanese Bishop Daniel Adwok Marko Kur, the Auxiliary Bishop of Khartoum Archdiocese, Sudan, emphasized:

Any pastoral assessment is to be carried out within the Small Christian Communities, interactive and interdependent with the leadership of the church. [Small] Christian Communities are the privileged place where the church can ask and respond to the most pertinent questions of the time. Who are we? What is moving us? What are we here for? Where are we heading to?²⁹⁶

As a concrete sign of this rebuilding and revitalization process the Palica Center in Wau Diocese, South Sudan gave a one day workshop on “Building Christian Community” for priests and other pastoral workers on 28 February, 2012.²⁹⁷ Highlights included talks on “The Origins, Establishment and Growth of SCCs,” the reflection method of the Seven Steps of Gospel Sharing and the “Nine Differences between SCCs and Associations.”²⁹⁸

2014 reports from Tombura--Yambio Diocese are encouraging. South Sudanese diocesan priest Father Mark Kumbonyaki Soro is the Pastoral Coordinator of Tombura-Yambio Diocese. He reports that SCCs are strong in the Ave Maria Parish and Nsara Center.²⁹⁹ American Maryknoll missionary priest Father Jim Noonan, MM reports:

The Small Christian Communities Movement has begun in a few parishes, but much fertile ground for transforming individuals and Christian Communities is ripe for the harvest. The People of God in Yambio are able and ready to be witnesses, a new light to many other churches way beyond their borders.³⁰⁰

²⁹⁶ Daniel Adwok Marko Kur, “Pastoral Challenges for the Church in the New Divided Sudan: A New Era of Evangelization Has Dawned” in *One Church from Every Tribe, Tongue and People: Symposium on the Role of the Church in the Independence of South Sudan*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2012, p. 175.

²⁹⁷ This workshop was mentioned in connection with how SCCs are participating in the proposed pastoral project: “Liturgical Formation Program and Pastoral and Spiritual Formation Program for the Pastoral Parish Councils for the Triennium 2013 – 2015 at PALICA Center, Diocese of Wau, South Sudan.”

²⁹⁸ Palica Team, “Building Christian Community,” Wau: Privately Duplicated, 2012.

²⁹⁹ Mark Kumbonyaki Soro, conversation with the author in Nairobi, 7 May, 2014.

³⁰⁰ James Noonan, “Informative Pastoral Visit to Yambio 11-23/04/2014,” Juba: Unpublished Paper, 2014.

Two AMECEA countries have a variety of small communities that do not fit the normal description of a SCC in Eastern Africa. Ethiopia has 12 dioceses: one archdiocese (that includes a Pastoral Territory), two eparchies, eight apostolic vicariates and one apostolic prefecture. Nine dioceses follow the Latin Rite so can easily follow the AMECEA Model of SCCs that are neighborhood, parish-based Small Christian Communities.

Three dioceses of Ethiopia and all four dioceses of Eritrea follow the Geez Rite³⁰¹ (also called the Ethiopian Rite and the Oriental Rite). This rite came from the Coptic Orthodox Church (commonly referred to as part of the Uniate Eastern Church – the 22 Eastern Catholic churches that are in union with Rome), not the Roman (Western) Catholic Church. It follows the model of the early Christian Church and uses names of the early Christian Church.³⁰²

SCCs are coordinated through the Ethiopian Pastoral Activities Commission of the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat (ECS). The Pastoral Coordination on the national level is described as follows:

Each year there has been at least one [national] pastoral seminar for priests, sisters, catechists, laity and youth leaders on different themes. These seminars enabled all pastoral agents to deepen their knowledge in Biblical, Spiritual, Social, Catechesis, Sacraments, Christian Doctrine, family, dignity and role of women, youth ministry, etc. and also the methods of spreading the Good News of the Lord to different categories of people as a whole. More than 1000 people have been capacitated by short term seminars/workshops on different areas of pastoral fields.³⁰³

Diocesan seminars are described as follows:

One of the major areas in which the diocesan seminars focused was on the Pastoral Letter of the Ethiopian Catholic Bishops *The Church We Want to Be*. The message was discussed in depth at the parochial level and also in the Small Christian Communities for its implementation. The faithful together with their pastors have shown their readiness to implement and act according to the given guidance.³⁰⁴

³⁰¹ How many SCC members in the other AMECEA countries understand the Geez liturgies (the rite in Ethiopia)? For those familiar with Latin or Roman Rite in the Western Church, it is like a sung High Mass in Latin. One challenge is to be open and supportive of inculturation in all parts of Eastern Africa.

³⁰² Based on two conversations: With Ethiopian Deacon Abrha Tesfay Teare, MAfr in Nairobi on 1 March, 2012, He finished his fourth year of theology at Tangaza University College in May, 2012 and is presently serving in Uganda. With Abba Hailemariam Worako, OFM Cap in Addis Abba, Ethiopia on 16 February, 2014.

³⁰³ Described on the Ethiopian Catholic Church (ECC) Website, <http://www.ecs.org.et>, retrieved 30 December, 2013.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

In 1976 when the AMECEA Bishops established SCCs as the key pastoral priority in Eastern Africa, the Ethiopian and Eritrean Bishops opted for the traditional devotional small community or association called *Mahber*.³⁰⁵ It is a devotional group with a long history and significance. Ethiopian Abba Kibera Tseggai states:

According to the Ethio/Eritrean Geez Rite Church, *Mahber* is a spiritual Christian community or association – of the Small Christian Communities type – being now experimented and recommended by the First African Synod as described by [St.] John Paul II in *The Church in Africa*. *Mahber* is a Basic Christian Community already well established from the apostolic period and better revived in the Geez Rite Church particularly from 1400 AD. Usually it is constituted of 12 families recalling the community of Christ with his 12 disciples.³⁰⁶

Mahber offers importance social support in the Ethiopian family system. Eritrean Abune [Bishop] Kidane Yebio of the Catholic Eparchy of Keren, Eritrea explains:

The Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Catholic Geez Rite in the Church in Eritrea and Ethiopia [also called the Ethiopian Rite] are called *Mahber* (plural *Mahberat*). These groups consist of 12 families and are formed according to popular devotions to Our Lady, Holy Savior, Holy Trinity, Archangel Gabriel, Archangel Michael, St. George and St. Joseph. These *Mahberat* imitate the 12 Apostles who formed the first community of disciples around Jesus. They meet every month for a Recollection Day on the Patron/Patroness Saint's feast day that includes: Eucharist, rosary, a reflection by the parish priest and an *agape*. Works of mercy and charity are carried out between the monthly meetings. These devotional small communities have a big role in the re-evangelization of our people. These groups enable the lay people to be propagators of the faith in places where the church is not present.³⁰⁷

The explanation of *Mahber* as a traditional small community or association of the Geez Christians especially the importance of the *agape*, the communal meal is explained as follows:

Every month all the members gather in the house of a family who is a member of the *Mahber* or near a church. This means every family has one day in a year to prepare the *agape*. All eat from one *meadi* (plate) and drink together from one cup to express their unity, communion and love. They are

³⁰⁵ Some Ethiopian students and students with pastoral experience in Ethiopia in our SCCs Courses have written interesting and challenging course papers on Mabher.

³⁰⁶ Kibera Tseggai, "Mahber," "Small Christian Communities in the Light of the African Synod," AMECEA *Documentation Service* (ADS), 7/No. 453/1996 (1 April, 1996), p. 6.

³⁰⁷ Abune [Bishop] Kidane Yebio in an email message to the author dated 14 July, 2011.

called the brothers or sisters of the *meadi* or cup. Eating together is a very serious business according to the Cushite culture. This *meadi* and cup have nothing to do with filling the stomach or quenching the thirst. It is elevating the profane to the level of sacred using the African value as an expression of Christianity. This socialization is transformed into a community under God's sovereignty (1 *Timothy* 4:4-5). The fact of eating together makes the community more pure. The eating together is an acknowledgement of peace, friendship, trust of each other, love, charity and reconciliation. The family is built especially at the common meal. This eating together is a very strong symbolic saying that the members of the *Mahber* make use of.³⁰⁸

This communal meal is a very good example and model for the meals and celebrations in the SCCs in other parts of Eastern Africa.

As a Case Study a *Mahber* called the Sacred Heart Association met on Friday, 14 February, 2014 (the first Friday of the Month following the Ethiopian Calendar) in Holy Savior Church in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. There were 43 participants: 28 women and 15 men.³⁰⁹ After participating in the Geez Mass in the main church, people gathered in one of the parish halls for a talk on the Gospel by the parish priest and discussion and planning led by the *Mahber* leaders. This was followed by a simple meal (*agape*). In the afternoon there was eucharistic adoration in the main church.

Activities of this small community or association include some *Bible* Sharing and Faith-sharing at some of their monthly meetings; its own choir that sings at some of the big parish liturgies; visiting the sick and offering financial help; and a Community Treasury for special needs.³¹⁰

Some of the activities of other *Mahberat* in Ethiopia are:

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

³⁰⁸ Alazar Abraha, "Building a Christian Community and Communion," *New People*, 145 (July-August, 2013), p. 10.

³⁰⁹ Normally the *Mahber* consists of separate men and women groups such as Gabriel for men and Mary for women.

³¹⁰ Interview with Ethiopian Capuchin Abba Mengesha Toma, OFM Cap, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 15 February, 2014 and Ethiopian layman Abel Musse, 17 February, 2014.

- Offering economic support to needy members of the small community itself and in the neighborhood.

While the term SCCs is not well known in Ethiopia, some of the activities of SCCs in other AMECEA countries take place in the *Mahber*. Yet Ethiopian Missionaries of Africa Deacon Abrha Tesfay Teare, MAfr points out that “the Ethiopians’ understanding of Small Christian Communities and their perception on women’s participation in SCCs as well as in the church are different.”³¹¹ Mejia states that “Mahber has a a different DNA than SCC.”³¹²

Ethiopian Cardinal Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, CM of Addis Ababa Archdiocese, Ethiopia states: “The Ethiopian Catholic Church that belongs to the Oriental Churches prepares its agents of evangelization both in the traditional ways and also in the modern ways. We start first with Christian families, the home, the small church from where they get their formation. Then to the parishes.”³¹³

After the 2011 AMECEA Plenary Assembly it was suggested that the Catholic Church in Eritrea and Ethiopia further explore their own inculturated small community SCC models. These models would be different than the common SCCs models present in the predominantly Latin Rite of the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa.

During a visit to Ethiopia in February, 2014 I visited different places and interviewed a number of people to better understand small communities and Small Christian Communities in the Ethiopian context.³¹⁴ I discovered that “Small Christian Communities” as they are experienced in other parts of the AMECEA Region are not well known and understood in Ethiopia. I heard eight different terms (alphabetically) with their different meanings and interpretations:

- Bible Sharing Group
- Bible Study Group
- Extended Family Together
- *Mahber*
- Small Apostolic Group
- Small Christian Community
- Small Prayer Group
- Small Village Prayer Group

³¹¹ Abrha Tesfay Teare, *Women’s Role in Small Christian Communities in Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish, South B, Nairobi: Challenges and Opportunities*, Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Tangaza University College (CUEA), 2012, p. 4.

³¹² Rodrigo Mejia, conversation with the author, Nairobi, Kenya, 7 August, 2014.

³¹³ Berhaneyesus Souraphiel in a video interview in the DVD *50 Years of AMECEA*. Lusaka: Catholic Media Services, 2011.

³¹⁴ Four people who were very helpful were: Cardinal Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, Abel Muse, Ethiopian Vincentian Abba Hagos Hayish, CM, Secretary General of the Ethiopian Catholic Bishops Conference and Ethiopian Capuchin Abba Hailegabriel Meleku, OFM Cap, National Pastoral Coordinator of the Ethiopian Catholic Bishops Conference.

Mahber is particularly important. But it should not be seen in conflict with or opposition to a SCC. In fact Muse states: “I am very much impressed by the ministry of building SCCs. The Catholic Church needs to be empowered and built on a solid foundation so the establishment of SCCs is the best strategy.”³¹⁵

The local context in Ethiopia has some striking statistics. The overall population is 90 million people. 63% of the population is under 25 years old. The Christian population including all churches and denominations is 62% that includes: Orthodox – 44%, Protestants (Mainline Churches and Pentecostal Churches) – 17%. At present there are 1,116 Pentecostal Churches registered with the Ethiopian Government. There are 700,000 Catholics. A disturbing factor is that the overall Catholic population has decreased from 1.0% to 0.7%. 80% belong to the Latin (Roman) Rite) and 20% to the Geez Rite. Several Catholic leaders told me that the pastoral activities of some forms of small communities on the local level could help reverse this trend.

Ethiopian Capuchin Abba Gabriel Meskel Magino, OFM Cap explained the plan of his St. Anthony Parish, Ashira in Hosanna Diocese. The parish has eight zones with 28 chapels (similar to outstations). The SCCs called *Bete Tsellote* (“prayer house” in the national language Amharic) meet every week in the geographical area of its chapel on Tuesday, Thursday or Friday depending on the availability of the catechist. The meeting includes a teaching by the catechist and *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection*. The Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) has 20 members. The SCCs are represented through the zonal representatives.

A significant local problem in St. Anthony’s Parish is that the Catholic Choirs are influenced by the aggressive, evangelistic choirs of the Pentecostal Churches both in the style of the songs (for example, moving from drums to keyboards) and the content. Catholic youth are attracted to the more lively and entertainment-oriented Pentecostal services.³¹⁶ Abune (Bishop) Tsegaye Keneni, the Bishop of Soddo Diocese, said that in Soddo town the aggressive Pentecostal Churches rent other Protestant Churches and various halls for their lively daily prayer services during the week.³¹⁷ One of the main challenges discussed during our February, 2014 National SCCs Workshop was: “Migration of young people from the Catholic Church.” One can ask: Will the Catholic youth in Ethiopia continue to attend the traditional Geez liturgies? Can some form of Youth SCC help to reverse this migration (including economic migration) trend?

Ethiopian Capuchin Abba Gabrielyesus, OFM Cap, Director of the Capuchin Posulancy in Soddo Diocese explained how various *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* methods are used in various formation houses and formation programs in Ethiopia. For example, every Saturday evening in the Capuchin Posulancy there is *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* and Faith-sharing on the three scripture readings of the following Sunday. Sometimes *Lectio Divina* is used. This method is continued in the Capuchin Novitiate in Emidebir Diocese and

³¹⁵ Abel Muse, email message to the author dated 18 April, 2014.

³¹⁶ Interview with Ethiopian Capuchin Abba Gabriel Meskel Magino, OFM Cap, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 15 February, 2014.

³¹⁷ Conversation with Tsegaye Keneni, Debre Zeit, Ethiopia, 20 February, 2014.

the Capuchin Franciscan Institute of Philosophy and Theology in Addis Ababa Archdiocese.³¹⁸

Ethiopian Bishop Lesanu-Chrostos Matheos, the Auxiliary Bishop of Addis Ababa Archdiocese, Ethiopia asks how we can create a new interest in SCCs. In critiquing the *Mahber* he points out that at present they are not based on the neighborhood and they do not emphasize *Bible* Sharing. These characteristics are important in developing SCCs in Ethiopia today. A special challenge is to respond creatively to the changing sociological patterns in the neighborhoods in urban areas in Ethiopia. A new style of SCCs is needed for Catholics who are scattered and move frequently in cities such as Addis Abba. Lesanu-Chrostos Matheos states: “We have a difficulty in setting up SCCs in urban areas -- people are a minority, scattered and not neighbors.”³¹⁹

A Case Study is Hawassa Vicariate whose pastoral activities are well documented. SCCs are located in the 513 rural chapels that are part of the 19 parishes. The *Five Year (2013-2018) Strategic Plan* provides a broad vision and plan of action. In an evaluation of the vicariate the SWOT Pastoral Program states: “The faithful and youth are not well organized in small communities at vicariate level such as Catholic professionals, university members, etc.” Under “Pastoral Ministry Revitalization” Strategy 3 states: “Promotion of lay ministries: Faithful will be encouraged to actively participate in church leadership and have opportunities for training.” The short courses (five days) offered to lay leaders include: “Exercise of different ministries at the service of the Small Christian Communities.” Strategy 4 on “Restructuring the Parishes and the Method of Parish Ministry” states that “zonal chapels can be created by grouping 5-10 chapels together” while “the individual chapels would still remain a local Small Christian Community.”³²⁰

Evaluation of the presence and activities of SCCs in other dioceses in Ethiopia is uneven. The “Strategic Pastoral Plan 2014-2018” of the Ethiopian Catholic Church Pastoral Coordinating Office of Meki [Vicariate] (ECC-PACOM) under the section on “Strengthening of Small Christian Communities in the Parish” states: “Various Small Christian Communities will be encouraged to be strengthened in each parish. The priest will encourage the faithful to be organized in various groups. All Small Christian Communities will be strengthened. The groups will have a leader, secretary and cashier.” Other dioceses in Ethiopia do not promote small communities.

The draft document (in booklet form) from the 2013 Addis Ababa Archdiocesan Synod included a recommendation for an “Ecclesiastical Associations Coordinating Unit.” There is a need for such a unit to coordinate spiritual associations in the archdiocese. But

³¹⁸ Interview with Ethiopian Capuchin Abba Gabrielyesus, OFM Cap, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 14 February, 2014.

³¹⁹ Lesanu-Chrostos Matheos’s comment during the Second Theological Colloquium on Church, Religion and Society in Africa (TCCRSA II), Theme: “The Church We Want: Theological Voices From Within and Outside the Church at the Service of Ecclesia in Africa,” Hekima University College Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations, Nairobi, Kenya, 7 August, 2014.

³²⁰ *Hawassa Catholic Secretariat: Five Year (2013-2018) Strategic Plan*. Hawassa: Hawassa Catholic Secretariat, 2013, pp. 24-43.

neither *Mahber* nor small communities were specifically mentioned in this booklet. So participants from Addis Ababa Archdiocese at the February, 2014 Small Communities Workshop in Debre Zeit agreed to bring to the implementation of the archdiocesan synod two specific tasks: first, the need to establish Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the archdiocese and second, to evaluate and revitalize the *Mahber* in the archdiocese.

Many people have participated in the Lumko Workshops held annually at the Galilee Center, Debre Zeit. The various methods of Gospel Sharing such as the seven-step method are used for private prayer, family prayer, formation programs and in a variety of small communities and small groups. Ethiopian Capuchin Abba Joseph Jacob, OFM Cap, the Pastor of Gassa Parish in Soddo Diocese, has participated in three 15-day Lumko courses. His bishop wanted him to get additional experience and training so he could facilitate Training of the Trainor (TOT) Workshops in his parish that has 46 SCCs that move from house to house on Sunday afternoon.³²¹

35 people participated in a National SCCs Workshop on the theme “Promoting Small Communities in Ethiopia in the Light of Pope Francis’ *The Joy of the Gospel* at the Galilee Centre in Debre Zeit, Ethiopia from 17 to 19 February, 2014. Participants included representatives from ten dioceses and various departments and movements including Pastoral Coordinators and CARITAS: 20 priests, 6 religious sisters, seven laymen and two laywomen. It focused on Pope Francis’ Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*. The workshop stressed integral holistic development and joint pastoral planning in the Ethiopian context.

Ethiopian layman Aman Desalegn reports on the follow-down:

After the workshop the group from Meki Diocese took immediate action. We translated *The Joy of the Gospel* in Amharic and gave a Powerpoint Presentation at a diocesan workshop at the Gighesa Catechetical Center. This TOT Workshop was given to catechists, youth and parish council members who were certified to teach in their respective parishes. Then workshops were given in the parishes to train the parishioners in different ways. The youth especially agree to implement the teaching of Pope Francis.

The Catholic Church in Eritrea has had a particularly painful recent history. In the 1990s Peter Lwaminda and Wolfgang Schonecke of the AMECEA Office helped to promote Lumko SCCs training courses in Eritrea. With the change of political winds it was harder to have workshop facilitators enter the country and Eritreans had more difficulty getting permission to leave the country to participate in workshops in other parts of Eastern Africa.

The “Evaluation of AMECEA Pastoral Mission of Evangelization in Solidarity 1961-2011” asked: “How the Promotion of Small Christian Communities Inspired by the Vision of AMECEA Has Been Carried out Under the Bishops’ Jurisdiction.” 52.6 % responded that “parishes have active Small Christian Communities.”

Neighborhood (geographical/territorial), parish-based SCCs are an official ecclesial structure in the Eastern African pastoral model of church and an instrument/vehicle/tool of evangelization. This is the type of small community that the AMECEA Plenary Meetings of

³²¹ Interview with Joseph Jacob, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 16 February, 2014.

1973, 1976 and 1979 envisioned. They are not simply small prayer groups or Small Apostolic Groups³²² (also called parish associations/sodalities/organizations) or the traditional outstation/village church. They comprise approximately 80% of the SCCs in the AMECEA Region. Alphonse Omolo, a Kenyan lay leader and animator of SCCs in a meeting in October, 2011 emphasized: “SCCs are not just one of the groups in the Catholic Church, but it is the Church.”³²³

The DVD *50 Years of AMECEA* portrays St. Lawrence SCC of St. Francis de Sales Parish in Lusaka, Zambia with this commentary: “Small Christian Communities are, in fact, an extension of good neighborliness intended to share Scripture, pray together, care for the sick and show concern on issues of justice and peace. A SCC member describes their life and ministry in these words: “Small Christian Communities are interesting. We strengthen each other in our faith. Every strong Christian has to start from a Small Christian Community. If there is an illness we support each other.”

Ugandan theologian Father Paulino Mondo, MCCJ points out:

Within active Small Christian Communities, people find a safe place to talk about their lives and their faith. Somehow, coming together regularly to reflect strengthens people. It is a mysterious process not easy to understand, but I have seen its fruits time and time again...[SCC members] come to know the Lord in a more personal way and become accountable to one another for growing in their relationships with the Lord.³²⁴

Other types are called Specialized SCCs or Special Interest Communities that comprise approximately 20% of the SCCs in the AMECEA Region and are growing fast.³²⁵

³²² James O’Halloran describes the considerable sociological differences between small communities and small groups (whether religious or secular), *Living Cells*, pp. 77-79.

Some of the fastest growing small groups in the USA include the religious small groups of the Evangelical Churches, the 12-Step Self-Help Support Groups, a wide variety of other Self-help Groups and various Secular Small Groups. In visits to Catholic dioceses in the USA I hear references to the importance of small groups in many different contexts, but this is significantly different than SCCs as a new model of church and a new way of being church.

In a conversation in Boston, Massachusetts, USA on 24 November, 2015 American Catholic layman Dennis Taylor referred to the various Secular Small Groups that he belongs to or is familiar with: Book Club, Library Group, Literary Group, Mens’ Group and Psychiatrists. Club and Sharing Group. These are often mixed groups and intercultural groups that focus on the dialog of different views.

³²³ Alphonse Omolo in an email message to the author dated 5 October, 2011.

³²⁴ Paulino Mondo, *Small Christian Communities: An Ideal Means for Renewing the Church Within AMECEA Countries*, Eldoret: Unpublished Paper, 2009, p. 2-3.

³²⁵ Sometimes these Specialized SCCs are Support Groups with a spiritual dimension. For example, separate Small Christian Communities (SCCs) of men and women who reflect on their medical HIV/AIDS Status.

Many of these SCCs have emerged from reading the contemporary signs of the times in Africa and responding to today's reality. They respond to the spirit of the Spanish proverb popular with the Base or Basic Christian Communities in Latin America: *We create the path by walking.*³²⁶

Cieslikiewicz points out:

The first SCCs were based on the traditional rural neighborhood communities and were suited to rural pastoral activities. The AMECEA Bishops did not offer any model for SCCs in the urban context; and that is why pastoral activities in the urban areas of that time were insignificant. With the passing of years, however, towns have undergone profound changes "in organization and style of social and ecclesial life induced especially by increasing mobility (spatial, social and cognitive). As consequence of these changes community of place has now been joined, though not superseded, by community of interest"³²⁷...

In the past the principal model of SCCs reflected the characteristic of the model of the pastoral option accepted by the Church in Eastern Africa. If we speak of the model of SCCs proposed by the AMECEA Bishops in the 1970s, social or political problems were almost totally lacking during that time. These communities, therefore, were concerned mostly with the internal problems, of the parish, community, family or individual member...

At present it is unthinkable to resign from the idea of SCCs in the Church of Eastern Africa. Today nobody questions the need for SCCs in the life of the Local Church and of the faithful. The question that needs to be asked is: what kind of SCCs do we need today in the new and challenging socio-cultural context.³²⁸

³²⁶ This is based on the Spanish poem:

Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar.
wanderer, there is no road, the road is made by walking.

of the Spanish poet Antonio Machado (1875 – 1939). See Antonio Machado, *Campos de Castilla* (1912)

Compare with the Buddhist saying that goes *the path is made in the walking*. An African proverb says: *The path is made by walking*. A Tonga, Malawi proverb says: *A path is made by walking the same way many times*.

³²⁷ Patrick, Kalilombe, *From Outstation to Small Christian Communities: A Comparison of Two Pastoral Methods in Lilongwe Diocese*, Doctorate Dissertation, Berkeley: University of California, 1983, p. 189.

³²⁸ Christopher Cieslikiewicz, "Urban Small Christian Communities and Formation for the New Vision of the Church: Tanzanian Study Case," *Africa Tomorrow*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (June, 2006), pp. 89-92.

There are many types, categories and models with the one common feature being they are *not* neighborhood (geographical) small communities in the parish. Sometimes the difference between a genuine SCC and a Small Apostolic Group is blurred. Some types and categories:

1. Extraterritorial (not a neighborhood group) or floating SCCs. The first kind is interested people who live outside the parish boundaries, want to stay connected and meet weekly as a SCC. In some parishes in Nairobi Archdiocese these SCCs meet on the parish compound before or after participating in the Sunday Mass. The Cathedral Parish in Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi has specific “International SCCs” that are composed of people of different nationalities (especially expatriates) and use English as the common language. They come from all over the city of Lilongwe and meet in the middle of the week in their homes. For some SCC members this requires a lot of driving.³²⁹ The second kind is interested people who live throughout the diocese and meet weekly at a downtown parish during the lunch break. An example is Mombasa Archdiocese.

2. SCCs connected to educational institutions including seminaries, houses of religious formation, universities (both student groups and alumni/alumnae groups), high school boarding schools (called secondary schools in Eastern Africa)³³⁰ and training centers. These are called school-based SCCs. SCCs connected to institutions such as hospitals, military camps and prisons.³³¹ Specialized and professional groups³³² (doctors, lawyers, medical students, nurses, teachers, youth, deaf people, handicapped people).

3. Catholics who form a peer support group coming from a felt need for sharing personal experiences, companionship, support, common cultural interests and ministry preparation. Examples:

³²⁹ Vincent Mwachwawa in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 11 January, 2012.

³³⁰ Kilaini emphasizes that every Catholic Boarding School in Tanzania should have a plan of SCCs.

³³¹ Kenyan layman Geoffrey Kamau, the Kenya Government Catholic prison chaplain in Kamiti Prison in Nairobi, states: “We form SCCs in the prison blocks for prisoners to come together for prayer and in order to create a ‘human face.’” There are 12 SCCs in their respective blocks that come together for prayer and *Bible* Sharing. He prepares them for the reception of the sacraments. The prisoners receive both pastoral and psychological counseling.

³³² The Knights (and Ladies) of St. Charles Lwanga in Kampala Archdiocese, Uganda is like an online YSCC on LinkedIn that unites 15 young Catholic Professionals and encourages them after tertiary education to continue in the evangelizing mission of the church. It is a network that serves as an open discussion group on topics like the Catholic Saints, Lent, relationships and entrepreneurship. They also have mass, recollection days and other spiritual activities.

- Confirmation Communities: young people in small groups who are preparing themselves for the Sacrament of Confirmation.
- Small Catechumen Communities (as part of the RCIA Program):³³³ a specific type of Small Christian Community where the adult catechumens in a parish, subparish or outstation form their own SCC to reflect on the *Bible*, talk about the Catholic faith and journey together as a community. This small community can include: the adult catechumens themselves, their Pastoral Accompaniers in their own SCCs, their sponsors for Baptism and Confirmation, catechists and other interested baptized Catholics in the local parish or outstation community who want to renew/deepen their faith and share their faith experiences. Sometimes after the Holy Saturday Easter Vigil Service, a new SCC is started of newly baptized adults in the RCIA Program who want to remain together as a small community.^{334 335}

Other examples: priests, deacons, catechists who meet weekly to prepare their Sunday homilies together (sometimes in a parish team with lay involvement); retired people; single mothers; young single Catholics, widows/widowers, people suffering the loss of a loved one (bereavement), spouses of depressed people, parents with children who have disabilities, etc.

- Cultural Associations that are critiqued on page 231.

4. Small Faith-sharing/Small Reflection groups connected to international church movements (including the New Ecclesial Movements) in the Catholic Church and other organizations. Small Faith-sharing/faith reflection groups connected to the charisms of various religious congregations, societies and organizations. Some of these Small Apostolic Groups are in parishes, but are mainly not parish-based. Some examples in Eastern Africa: Christian Life Communities (CLCs) [formerly called Sodalities], Communion and Liberation, Focolare, Grail Movement, International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS), Jesus Caritas Fraternities (communities following the spirituality of St. Charles de Foucauld), Magis, Marianists, Neo-catechumenal Way, Opus Dei, Pioneers, Pontifical Missionary Union (PMU), Sant'Egidio, Taize, Third-Order Franciscans, Young Christian Students (YCS) and Young Christian Workers (YCW).

Depending on the part of the world, Small Communities on college campuses can be called (alphabetically): Campus Ministry Program, Campus Ministry Small Group, Movement in the Catholic Church, Program on College Campus, Small Apostolic Group,

³³³ Described in Oswald Hirmer, *Our Journey Together: 47 Catechetical Sessions for Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)*, St. Paul Publications Africa (later Paulines Publications Africa), 1998, 2006.

³³⁴ Holy Family Basilica in Nairobi Archdiocese has formed four such SCCs from successive newly baptized groups at the Easter Vigil: St. Dominic, St. Joseph, St. Augustine and St. Paul.

³³⁵ This confirms the experience of American catechetical specialist Father Jim Dunning who emphasized “the connection between Small Christian Communities and the catechumenate *before, during and after* initiation.” See Robert Moriarty, SM, “Imaging Initiation (RCIA) in Small Christian Communities” in Healey and Jeanne Hinton, *Small Christian Communities Today*, p. 55.

Small Community on College Campus, Small Faith Group on College Campus, on College Campus and Voluntary Apostolic Group.

Many of these Small Apostolic Groups emphasize *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* in small groups both in their regular meetings and in recollection days and retreats. A Case study is Taize's retreats for young adults in Nairobi.

Preparing ourselves to become leaders in our local groups and communities requires deep roots in a personal relationship with Christ. The retreats at Mji wa Furaha are aimed to develop the capacity of young adults in taking responsibilities. Together we want to go to the wellsprings of faith through prayer, *Bible* reflection and an experience of communion sharing, common life, personal reflection and silence... Each morning, Brothers of Taizé will introduce a *Bible* reflection, followed by a time of silence and sharing in small groups. In the afternoon, practical work and seminars will help us to deepen the relationship between faith and life. Experiencing a simple life shared with others reminds us that daily life is the place where Christ is waiting for us.³³⁶

These retreats can be excellent formation and training for members of Youth SCCs.

Our research shows that the international church movements (including the New Ecclesial Movements) in the Catholic Church have brought much energy, enthusiasm and creativity to the African Church. Their approach to African youth is threefold:

- They can draw the Catholic youth out of the parish into specialized groups of that particular ecclesial movement.
- They can establish specialized groups of Catholic youth within the parish having the charism of that particular ecclesial movement.
- They can help form and train Catholic youth to participate more actively in their parish on the local level.

Cardinal Pengo welcomed international movements into Dar es Salaam Archdiocese but he emphasized that he did not want them to establish a parallel structure alongside the diocesan/parish structure. He said the movements should feed energy into the parishes, not take energy (and people) away from it. He stated why he likes SCCs so much is that they are parish-based and are an excellent means for the Catholic laity to energize the parish and participate in pastoral activities themselves on the local level.

5. Online SCCs. The fastest growing type of SCCs. The most popular model is WhatsApp SCCs. A physical SCC can have a WhatsApp community. Also some WhatsApp SCCs only meet online.

One of the key values of these various types of SCCs is that they are important support groups for their members. Many are also Faith-sharing/faith reflection groups.

³³⁶ Taize International Retreats, *Mji wa Furaha*, August, 2014, Religious Superiors' Conference of Kenya (RSCK) Email Message 1 July, 2014.

Are these specialized groups or Special Interest Communities really SCCs? We can apply the [28 Criteria to Evaluate a Typical SCC in Eastern Africa](#). Four criteria are especially relevant:

1. No. 10. The SCC has some kind of Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection/Bible—Life Connections on a regular basis.
2. No. 13. The SCC has some kind of planned practical action, service, mutual aid, and social outreach. Ideally this is a communal response where the SCC members carry out the practical action as a group.
3. No. 18. The SCC has various pastoral responsibilities, decisions, and activities in the parish. These include service to parish activities like the Sunday Liturgy, the SCC members' religious education³³⁷ and preparation for receiving the sacraments and financial support of the parish.
4. No. 23. The SCC officially participates in the parish structures as a “communion of communities” (or “community of communities” or “network of communities”) model of church.³³⁸ For example, the SCC (or a group of SCCs) has a representative on the Outstation, Subparish or Parish Council/Parish Pastoral Council. Leadership starts from below.

Some of these specialized groups can be classified as SCCs. Others that are small prayer groups, small *Bible Study Groups*, small, felt need support groups³³⁹ focused on one priority only and small social groups with no outside involvement cannot be classified as SCCs strictly speaking. It is advised that a committed Catholic remain part of his or her neighborhood SCC and participate in a small felt need support group at the same time such as

³³⁷ A Case Study is St. Charles Lwanga Small Christian Community in the Drive-in Estate of St. Peter's Parish in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania that has special sessions to teach the fundamentals of the Catholic Faith (prayers, sacraments, commandments, etc.) to children in the community.

³³⁸ Sociologists describe the differences in the meaning of “communion” (ideally based on intimacy, friendship and spiritual sharing), “community” and “network.”

There are other metaphors for a vision of the parish. The parish can serve as the “umbrella” under which a plethora of smaller, “true” communities can shelter: Small Faith-sharing Groups, mothers' clubs, scouting troops, sodalities, etc...the parish, while not a true community in itself, can serve as the locale and catalyst for fostering the real communities in which the faith is lived and expressed.” American Sister of Charity sociologist Sister Patricia Wittberg, SC, *Building Strong Church Communities: A Sociological Overview*, Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2012, page 31.

³³⁹ Michael Cowan and Bernard Lee state: “A community without a recognizable public life is better understood as a support group and...a community without a strong inner life is better understood as an action group.” *Conversation, Risk, and Conversion: The Inner & Public Life of Small Christian Communities*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.

the widows groups in Mombasa, Kenya and in Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya.

A common example is the many parishes and centers that have *Bible Study Groups*³⁴⁰ and *Bible* courses for a specific period of time and covering specific books of the *Bible*. These programs can greatly enrich SCC members' knowledge and experience, but participation should be on a "both...and" basis. They should not substitute for the weekly lectionary-based Faith-sharing SCCs.

American laywoman and evangelist Mrs. Belza Ramos emphasizes strongly that small *Bible Study Groups* are *not* Small Christian Communities. The wide variety of *Bible Study Groups* have a beginning and an end that is connected to the specific tasks, for example, the study of St. *Luke's* Gospel or St. Paul's Letter to the *Ephesians*. So they go in and out of existence depending on the interest and energy of the members. Some *Bible Study Groups* are purely academic – interested only in the study of the scripture text and involving more the head than the heart.³⁴¹ However Small Christian Communities involve its members in the variety of activities on a regular, even daily, and ongoing basis.³⁴²

While the growth of these specialized SCCs is good, the AMECEA bishops continue to stress the primary importance of the more numerous pastoral, parish-based, territorial neighborhood SCCs. A newer challenge is how to integrate these specialized Small Apostolic Groups into the parish "communion of communities" model of church. An important distinction is which of the Small Apostolic Groups that are connected to the New Ecclesial Movements³⁴³ are parish-based and which are not. Cardinal Polycarp, the Archbishop of Dar es Salaam Archdiocese, Tanzania emphasizes that these specialized SCCs should support and energize the parish, not take energy away from it (such as encouraging lay leaders to get involved in other activities outside the parish).³⁴⁴ Archbishop James Odongo, the retired

³⁴⁰ Research and evaluation indicates that people participate in these study groups for short periods of time, but they don't hold people's interest and time over long periods especially if they are too academic/intellectual/"heady."

³⁴¹ But this is the traditional interpretation. There are other methods. Amy Jackson writes: "Group *Bible* study truly is a blessing. Together we can understand and apply the Word in new ways. I'll never forget my first inductive *Bible* study of James. The Word came alive for me for the first time. I not only understood what I was reading, but also saw how to apply it to my life." *Small Groups Newsletter*, 22 June, 2016.

³⁴² Summary of Belza Ramos' views in a Skype conversation with the author on 2 April, 2015.

³⁴³ New Ecclesial Movements have certainly brought new life and energy into the Catholic Church throughout the world in the last 50 years. Especially in Europe where they are connected to parishes, they can be described as a fourth model, the New Ecclesial Movements Model of Church.

³⁴⁴ An interesting study has been done in the Latino (Hispanic) community in Paterson Diocese in the USA to see how the formation of Small Christian Communities as cells of evangelization can give life back to the parishes.

archbishop of Tororo, Uganda stresses that SCCs of university students should be an integral part of the university parish, not separate from it or parallel to it.

Cieslikiewicz gave this insight:

This territorial principle safeguards great values of solidarity and mutual assistance which takes a concrete shape in the neighborhood than in communities based on professions or interests. Territorial communities can still play a very important role in the life of parishes and society; it is in such communities that ethnocentrism is overcome, equality promoted, differences respected. SCCs found on common interests may bring about divisions and discrimination: poor, rich, tribalism...elements that do not contribute to *communion*.³⁴⁵

One present challenge is the effects of mixing the SCCs Model of Church and the Small Apostolic Group Model of Church ([traditional] parish apostolic or pious associations/societies/sodalities/organizations/devotional groups/clubs/church societies/ecclesial societies; parish commissions/committees/departments; special parish service/ministry groups) in a single parish.³⁴⁶ Recent research indicates that there are three broad categories of these Small Apostolic Groups that are volunteer groups with a wide variety of names:

Examples of [traditional] parish apostolic or pious associations/societies/ sodalities/guilds/ organizations/devotional groups/clubs are (alphabetically): Adoration, Bible Study, Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Catholic Men's Association (CMA), Catholic Women's Association (CWA), Choir, Communion and Liberation, Couples for Christ, Christian Life Communities (CLCs), Divine Mercy, Faithful House (FTH) Program, Family Enrichment Club, Focolare, Generation Christ, Handmaids for Christ, Holy Cross Family Ministry, Junior Legion of Mary, Kids for Christ, Legion of Mary, Magis, Marriage Encounter, Missionary Youth Movement (MYM), Neo Catechumenate, Pioneers, Pontifical Missionary Childhood (PMC), Pontifical Missionary Societies (PMS) Parents, Pontifical Missionary Youth (PMY), Project Rachel, Pro-Life, Rosary Society, Sacred Heart, Secular Franciscan Order (SFO), Servants for Christ, Singles for Christ, Sant'Egidio, St. Elizabeth of Hungary, Sunday School, St. Vincent de Paul, Taize, Sts. Joachim and Anne, Third Order of St. Francis, True Love Waits, Vocations, WhatsApp Support Groups (of many kinds), Widows, Young Christian Professionals, Young Christian Students (YCS), Young Christian Workers (YCW), Youth

³⁴⁵ Christopher Cieslikiewicz, "Urban Small Christian Communities," p. 97.

³⁴⁶ Kenyan diocesan priest Father Armogast Mdawida of Mombasa Archdiocese wrote his M.A. Thesis in Pastoral Ministry on this topic at Tangaza University College in Nairobi in 2012.

Worldwide another model is the Ministries/Services/Activities Model of Church. Many of these same ministries are present but they are not small. The Parish Youth Group, the Catholic Charismatic Group, the Women's Group, the Senior Citizens Group and the Knights of Columbus can have a hundred members. I met a pastor of a parish in Florida, USA who said that he has 90 ministries in his parish, many of which are support groups or self-help groups.

Alive, Youth for Christ and Youth Groups (Junior Youth and Senior Youth). Each has their own charism, spirituality, talents and interests. Complications arise when these groups too aggressively promote their own charism and spirituality in the parish at large or on the Parish Pastoral Council. **ADD in Later Places**

1. Examples of the parish commissions/committees/departments/activities with specific ministries are (alphabetically): Development, Education, Faith Formation, Family Life, Finance, Healthcare,³⁴⁷ Justice and Peace, Liturgy, Parish Pastoral Council (PPC), Pastoral, [Social] Communications,³⁴⁸ Social, Spiritual and Youth.³⁴⁹
2. Examples of parish service/parish ministry groups are (alphabetically): Altar Servers, Altar Society, Catechists, Choir, Eucharistic Ministers, Lectors, Liturgical Dancers and Ushers. Sometimes these are called ministerial Small Christian Communities.

Research over many years indicates that it is very difficult, if not impossible, to actively maintain both models (the SCCs Model of Church and the Small Apostolic Group Model of Church) simultaneously. At points the two models overlap and even collide. The committed Catholic lay person can spread herself or himself only so far. To take a typical example: a dedicated Catholic woman who is an active member of her SCC and at the same time a member of the weekly Catholic Charismatic Renewal Group, a member of the monthly Catholic Women's Association (CWA) and a member of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) –

³⁴⁷ Healthcare can be spelled as one or two words (health care). For consistency we use one word except when it is an official name such as Mombasa Catholic Community Based Health Care (CBHC) Services and Pandipieri Catholic Center Program of Home Based [Health] Care Workers (HBCWs). NOTE: The *Grammarist* states: **Healthcare** is on its way to becoming a one-word noun throughout the English-speaking world. The change is well underway in British publications, where *healthcare* already appears about three times as often as *health care* and is used as both a noun and an adjective. Many American and Canadian publications resist the change, meanwhile, and *health care* remains the more common form in North American newswriting, as well as in government and scholarly texts. In many cases—such as on health-related U.S. government websites—*health care* is the noun (e.g., “your health care is important”) and *healthcare* is the adjective (e.g., “find a healthcare professional”), but this is not consistently borne out, and both forms are widely used both ways. Many publications and websites seem to have no policy on this at all. The *Grammarist* Website, retrieved 2 September, 2016, <http://grammarist.com/spelling/healthcare>

³⁴⁸ Many parishes have bulletins, newsletters and magazines in which SCC members are involved. For example, on the Editorial Team of *The Basilican*, the Catholic Magazine of the Holy Family Basilica in Nairobi are members of the SCCs of St. Dominic, St. Augustine, St. Jude and Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Sometimes the Parish Youth Group or a YSCC sell the bulletins to make a little profit.

³⁴⁹ Sometimes the Parish Youth Groups operate like a SCC. For example, Regina Caeli Youth Group in Karen, Nairobi meets twice a week. About 15 members gather on Saturday for *Bible* Sharing and discussion on such topics as self-esteem, Lent, etc. About 30 members gather on Sundays for business matters.

along with her family responsibilities and a professional job. Usually she is elected to leadership positions in these groups. She can't do everything. Something has to suffer. Sometimes her involvement in her SCC takes second place. A related problem is when such an active Catholic is asked to make financial contributions to her parish both as a member of her SCC and as a member of her different apostolic groups it becomes impossible.

Malawian diocesan priest Vincent Mwachwawa writes:

The difficulty of maintaining these two models of SCCs (the neighborhood SCC and the associations/devotional groups model) has been a pastoral challenge in Lilongwe Archdiocese. Strengthening SCC life has been a problem because people neglected the SCCs because of devotional groups. Thus in the Lilongwe Archdiocesan Mini-synod held in 2004-2006 one of the resolutions was to encourage Christians to prioritize SCC activities over devotional groups/associations.³⁵⁰ Christians were taught that they first belong to SCCs and then from this foundation they can join other groups. Devotional groups/association leaders were reminded to respect the SCC activities and encourage the devotional groups/association members to participate actively in SCCs. This resolution helped Christians to understand and differentiate SCCs and devotional groups/associations.³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ Nigerian priest Matthew Bassah Shinkut, SMA writes about this tension in Nigeria in an article "Absence of Small Christian Communities and Active Presence of Devotional Groups in Nigeria: A Case Study of St. John's Parish Kachia in Kaduna Archdiocese." Retrieved from the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website on 12 May, 2012 <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/africa/nigeria/199-absence-of-small-christian-communities-and-active-presence-of-devotional-groups-in-nigeria-a-case-study-of-st-johns-parish-kachia-in-kaduna-archdiocese.html>. In English-speaking West Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, etc.) the Catholic Church has a strong institutional presence with the image of priests "running" the parishes and a heavy emphasis on spirituality and the sacraments. In a number of dioceses SCCs (with the involvement of lay people from the ground up) have never taken off.

Concerning West Africa, research shows:

1. Retired Nigerian Cardinal John Onaiyekan of Abuja Archdiocese points out that the SCC Model of Church has never been a pastoral priority in Nigeria because Nigeria has a strong Small Apostolic Groups Model of Church as seen in the lively, active small groups in the Catholic Charismatic Movement, Legion of Mary and the wide variety of devotional associations and organizations for example, specific associations for men and women such as the Confraternity of Christian Mothers, St. Joseph Community for Men, and St. Theresa Sodality for Girls. Conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 21 August, 2012.
2. Theology students from Ghana in my SCCs classes in Nairobi from 2010-2019 have emphasized that in Ghana there is more focus on small devotional groups than on SCCs.

³⁵¹ Vincent Mwachwawa in an email dated 8 May, 2012.

Segeja makes some helpful distinctions:

SCCs, therefore, should not be understood as fringe groups, nor groups for a few elite people, nor groups formed for a particular purpose, such as prayer groups. A SCC is radically different from a solidarity group, a Catholic Action group, a development group, a study group, although these are legitimate and valuable. SCCs are precisely the means by which the one church is present in each locality, touching the *whole life* of its members...SCCs should perceive themselves differently from “outstations” in the parish. They should perceive themselves as the realization of the Local Church.³⁵²

There are various realistic “thinking outside the box” approaches: All the above groups in the parish can develop a small community life style that uses Faith-sharing and faith reflection starting with prayer and Bible sharing as a “way of life” in all their gatherings. An example is the Youth Choir in Narus Parish in Torit Diocese in South Sudan. The choir meets on Tuesdays and Thursdays for singing practice and on Saturdays for *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection*.

Another solution is for SCC members who have a particular interest (rosary, special devotions, singing songs, praying in a charismatic way) to meet before the regular weekly *Bible Service* in the SCC. Or meet at another time for these kinds of religious and devotional activities.

Starting in the 1970s Mwoleka proposed a radical solution in Rulenge Diocese, Tanzania where all pastoral work passed through the SCCs. Two examples: Instead of having an overall Parish Hospitality Committee, each SCC was responsible to welcome newcomers and visitors in its neighborhood (geographic area). The praiseworthy home visitation ministry of the Legion of Mary became the responsibility of each SCC.³⁵³

³⁵² Nicholaus Segeja, “Small Christian Communities: A Vital Icon for New Evangelization,” *African Christian Studies*, 27: 4 (December, 2011): 11.

³⁵³ American pastor and SCCs advocate Father Art Baranowski wrote about, and practiced in his parish, a similar vision of church in Detroit Archdiocese, USA. He established small communities of faith and transformed existing parish programs into prayer and eucharistic communities. Arthur Baranowski, *Creating Small Church Communities: A Plan for Restructuring the Parish and Renewing Catholic Life*, 3rd Edition, Cincinnati, OH: St Anthony Messenger Press, 1996. He also adapted the personal and parish renewal process “Christ Renews His Parish” (CRHP) to the SCCs Model of Church and vice versa. The retreat is an pathway to the development of parish-based Small Church Communities. Baranowski adjusted the retreat format and the team formation process leading up to the retreat to infuse it with more of the Small Christian Community style. This evangelizing, conversion-focused retreat is designed to be done by the parish, for the parish, at the parish. It has been particularly effective in Hartford Archdiocese, USA. Bob Moriarty writes: “While the retreat is meant for parishioners in general, Fr. Art’s and our own special concern is to promote an evangelizing outreach to younger adults, men and women, in their 30s and early 40s.” See *Christ Renews His Parish Retreats: A Pathway to the Development of Small Church Communities*, http://www.sccquest.org/news_CRHP.html

Research on the composition and characteristics of the members of SCCs in Eastern Africa include these factors: age, cultural preferences, economic status (poor/rich), education, employment, ethnicity (one ethnic group/many), gender, geography (urban, urban/rural [called peri-urban in Zambia], rural/urban, rural),³⁵⁴ living/housing situation, marital status (single/engaged/married), political affiliation, etc. While the overwhelming majority are Catholics, there are some SCC members from other religious denominations. A major challenge is how to integrate creatively these differences.

Many SCCs are located in economically poorer areas. Italian missionary and writer Father Alex Zanotelli, MCCJ lived in Korogocho, one of the many shantytowns surrounding Nairobi. “He founded many small Christian communities and a workers' cooperative for recycling, which employed many of the inhabitants of the shanties.”³⁵⁵

One growing challenge is how to develop SCCs in urban areas. Kilaini points out:

The challenge of Dar es Salaam Archdiocese is to unite the Catholics from all those diverse origins with different status into one cohesive church. To have these people who are uprooted from their cultural home setting and are in an anonymous milieu keep their personal respect reinforced by mutual support in doing good. To give them a new clan and a new tribe whose cohesion is based on faith, love and care. In other words, to give them an extended family in the city that they left at home in the village.³⁵⁶

A Case Study is Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Adams Arcade in Nairobi Archdiocese that has 43 active SCCs. The SCCs are doing well in the poorer areas of the parish, but not doing well in the middle class areas of the parish. Also the middle class people do not want to mix with the poorer people. Given the democratization of the SCC model of church, a cook from a particular home can be the chairperson of his/her SCC while the homeowner is an ordinary member. A renter of a house can be the chairperson while the landlord or landlady is an ordinary member. This can cause tensions. Twenty-five years ago the then Father Rodrigo Mejia carried out research on SCCs in Nairobi Archdiocese. He discovered that the ethnic groups (Kamba, Kikuyu, Luo, Luyia, etc.) would mix together, but the rich and the poor would not.³⁵⁷ New research is needed to see if this pattern still hold today especially after the 2008 Post-Election violence in Kenya. Clearly new research shows that the tensions between the economically more wealthy SCCs and the economically poorer SCCs are growing especially when parish collections are coordinated through the SCCs.

³⁵⁴ See Footnote 64.

³⁵⁵ Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, retrieved on 16 March, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alex_Zanotelli

³⁵⁶ Method Kilaini, “Small Christian Communities,” p. 4.

³⁵⁷ In commenting on the Swahili saying *Usawa ni haki* (*Equality is justice and a right*) Ndaou Kelvin said: “This does rarely occur coz we've got two tribes, *maskini na tajiri* (Swahili for ‘the poor and the rich’). Message on the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Facebook Page dated 29 March, 2013.

Research shows that a statistical evaluation of SCCs in the AMECEA Region is better done on a diocese to diocese basis, and even on a parish by parish basis, rather than on a country to country basis. Of the 130 dioceses in the nine AMECEA countries some have structures or mechanisms that coordinate the activities of SCCs. Some dioceses such as Ngong Diocese in Kenya have specific a Small Christian Communities Office. Bishop Davies documents how the Ngong Diocesan Secretariat set up a SCCs Department with a religious sister in charge in 1985. She would team up with the Diocesan Catechists Coordinator and the person in charge of the Women's Department to give weekend courses and training sessions in parishes and in the diocesan pastoral center.³⁵⁸

Some dioceses such as Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese in Uganda have an active Diocesan SCCs Coordinator with a training team within the Diocesan Pastoral Department. Meru Diocese in Kenya has a priest in charge of the Small Christian Community Formation and Spirituality. Some dioceses such as Malindi Diocese in Kenya have a SCCs Diocesan Animation Team. Some dioceses such as Mombasa Archdiocese in Kenya coordinate SCCs through the Pastoral Coordinator of the Pastoral Office (called a Pastoral Department in some dioceses).³⁵⁹ Some dioceses have a Pastoral Center such as Arua Diocese in Uganda to sponsor SCCs activities. Some dioceses such as Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi have a Diocesan Pastoral Plan where the all the Parish Pastoral Councils are comprised of the chair people of the SCCs.

On the parish level Kanengo Parish in Liongwe Archdiocese is a city parish that has 40 SCCs. The whole structure of the parish is based on SCCs with SCCs Masses celebrated once a week. A similar parish is Chezi Parish, a rural parish in Liongwe Archdiocese. Holy Trinity Parish in Kariobangi North in Nairobi Archdiocese in Kenya has 74 SCCs that are deeply involved in many pastoral and social ministries.

Holy Cross Parish in Dandora, Nairobi begins its "Mission Statement" with the these words: "Formation of vibrant Small Christian Communities where people love and support one another." The parish has 59 SCCs including six active Youth SCCs. Case Studies of individual SCCs in Eastern Africa can very instructive and helpful too. Some are documented on the [Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website](#).

Research indicates that to develop SCCs as a new way of being church through a National SCC Office in the secretariat of the National Catholic Bishops Conference is not effective. It is too top heavy and bureaucratic. Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania and Uganda have explored a more appropriate mechanism: a National SCCs Training Team to animate and coordinate workshops, seminars and meetings.

³⁵⁸ Colin C. Davies, *Mission to the Maasai (1959-2003)*, Ngong: Privately Printed, 2006, p. 314.

³⁵⁹ Some Pastoral Offices or Departments have a permanent library of SCCs resources including books, booklets, pamphlets, posters and DVDs that include Lumko training materials. A key is that these SCCs resources remain in the office when a new director or secretary takes over and are used in ongoing formation and training programs.

As the number of Catholics and the numbers of parishes grow dramatically especially in urban Africa, Kenyan diocesan priest Joseph Otineo emphasizes that active Christian groups are the greatest indicators of a growing church. Kenyan diocesan priest John Kragu, the Pastor of St. Joseph Mukasa Kahawa West Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese, describes the 63 SCCs in his parish:

These are “clans” where the faithful are unified not by blood of kinship but the blood of Jesus Christ. It is in these groups that a lot of church activities are organized including prepaing couples for the sacrament of matrimony and children for Baptism.³⁶⁰

Fresh statistics in 2015 come from St. Matia Mulumba Parish in Irundu in Jinja Diocese, Uganda where “over 100 SCCs meet to discuss the weekly Scriptures and plan their response to the Word.”³⁶¹

A visit to Kakamega Diocese, Kenya from 19-22 February, 2015 produced interesting statistics. The 41 parishes average around 70 to 80 SCCs each making a total of around 3,000 for the whole diocese. Every lay person that I met is a member of a particular neighborhood SCC. It is indeed the normal way of life for them. The parish priests are enthusiastic and request “ministry workshops” on the deanery level to train SCC members in specific lay ministries.³⁶²

The Chaplaincy Centre at Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST) in Kakamega Diocese, Kenya has 20 Bible Study Groups (the equivalent of SCCs). A Fourth Year student described her St. Monica Group of 22 members that meets on Sundays.

A visit to Tororo Archdiocese, Uganda from 20-21 February, 2015 produce a similar pattern: 43 parishes with around a total of 3,000 Basic Christian Communities (equivalent of SCCs). As an example, the Benedictine Community BCC connected to the Benedictine Monastery in Tororo consists of the monks and the lay people living in the immediate neighborhood. There is a big difference between the BCCs in the rural and urban areas. The BCCs have brought unity to the Christians of the different ethnic groups.

In a wide ranging exclusive interview on Friday, 20 February, 2015 Archbishop Emeritus James Odongo of Tororo Archdiocese vividly described how his vision of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) begin when he was a seminarian in Rome in the 1950s. He lived at Propaganda Fide College with 350 students from 52 countries. Sometimes they formed smaller groups for prayer and socializing. Odongo experienced the value of small

³⁶⁰ Stephen, Seed **CHECK**

³⁶¹ James Cutts, “Across the Continents,” 22 January 2015, *Tablet*, Tablet Website, retrieved on 24 January, 2015, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/parish-practice/6/4469/across-the-continents>

³⁶² Based on conversations with Kenyan diocesan priest (and Secretary General of AMECEA) Father Ferdinand Lugonzo and Tanzanian diocesan priest incardinated in Kakamega Diocese (and Vicar General of Kakamega Diocese) Father Bede Marangu in Kakamega on 19-22 February, 2015.

groups composed of people from different countries and languages and the meaning and spirit of community. As a young priest and then bishop in Tororo Diocese (later Archdiocese) he saw the need to unite the 11 different ethnic groups. A very good pastoral method was to establish neighborhood SCCs.³⁶³

This local pastoral experience served him in good stead when as Chairman of AMECEA from 1973-1979 he oversaw the implementation of SCCs as a key pastoral priority in Eastern Africa.

Maryknoll missionary priest Father Mike Bassano, MM reports on an active SCC in the United Nations Camp for Internally Displaced People in Malakal, South Sudan. The camp has 33,000 IDPs. Every Saturday from 10 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. about 20-25 people (mainly women) meet in one of the homes to reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday (the next day). In what is perhaps a unique example for Africa, the Gospel is read in four languages (alphabetically): Arabic, English, Nuer and Shilluk. This is followed by lively sharing and singing. This prayer experience builds unity among the different ethnic groups.³⁶⁴

Analyzing Joseph G Healey Private Facebook Page Likes: 5, 5, 28 (Maryknoll Society General Chapter), 10, 17 (Judith's Story), 5, 3, 14 (Restorative Justice), 2, 3, 3, 9.

³⁶³ Joseph G. Healey, "Archbishop James Odongo Celebrates His Episcopal Golden Jubilee in Tororo, Uganda on 21 February 2015," Nairobi: Privately photocopied, 26 February, 2015. Reproduced as "Recollection of Memorable Moments as Retired Ugandan Archbishop Celebrates Episcopal Golden Jubilee," Catholic News Agency for Africa (CANAA), retrieved on 27 February, 2015, <http://www.canaafrica.org/index.php/home/16-latestnews/205-recollection-of-memorable-moments-as-retired-ugandan-archbishop-celebrates-episcopal-golden-jubilee>; "Ugandan Emeritus Archbishop Odongo Celebrates Golden Jubilee," Vatican Radio, retrieved on 26 February, 2015, http://en.radiovaticana.va/news/2015/02/26/ugandan_emeritus_archbishop_odongo_celebrates_golden_jubilee/1125792, UGANDA: "Archbishop Odongo; the first African Chairman of AMECEA"-- An Exclusive Interview by Fr Joseph Healey, retrieved on 28 February, 2015, <http://amecea.blogspot.com/2015/02/uganda-archbishop-odongo-first-african.html>

³⁶⁴ Mike Bassano, conversation with the author, Nairobi, Kenya, 22 January, 2017.

3 Qualitative Evaluation of the Growth of SCCs in the AMECEA Region

This qualitative evaluation traces some important historical shifts. Most commentators agree that the AMECEA Pastoral Priority initially/originally came from the top – from the official church expressed through statements of the AMECEA Bishops – and then spread through a trickledown effect. It did, however, correspond to the growing need experienced by African Christians to express their own values of community, unity, solidarity, family, sharing and mutual help in the context of their Christian faith. The sometimes-heard critique of a top down episcopal approach does not stand the test of time. Over the years a SCC identity from the grassroots has emerged with widespread participation and ownership by the laity.

Overall Rutechura summarizes:

Fifty years along the line Small Christian Communities have been one of the distinctive marks of what it means to be Church and neighbor in a good number of the [130] dioceses within the region that has a population of about 300 million of whom 30 million are Catholic Christians... The pastoral option by AMECEA Bishops to give a priority to building of SCCs has tremendously contributed to the quality of being Church in the region. We cannot envision being Church otherwise. SCCs have given more visibility to the Ecclesiology of Church Family of God. SCCs must not only be of interest for mere intellectual speculations; we must all be challenged to get involved and experience the warmth of communion and belonging.³⁶⁵

He adds: “The pastoral priority of the AMECEA bishops has been lively. The Church in the region has consistently pursued the building of SCCs... This is one of the main achievements that the bishops have had in the AMECEA Region.”³⁶⁶

From our recent research (see our SCCs Website), the most effective ongoing evaluation starts by examining how SCCs fit into/are an integral part of the Pastoral Plan of the Local Church – at the national, metropolitan, diocesan, deanery and parish levels. Recent Diocesan Synods feed into these Pastoral Plans.

SCCs have to be measured diocese by diocese in the AMECEA Region. Rutechura points out that “SCCs have spread and grown with different intensity within the various [130] dioceses in the AMECEA countries.”³⁶⁷ SCCs are widespread and active in most of the

³⁶⁵ Pius Rutechura, “The Experience of the AMECEA Region with Small Christian Communities, Pastoral Priority since the 1970s,” Unpublished Paper at the 27th Theological Week of Kinshasa on “The Experience of Basic Living Ecclesial Communities in the Democratic Republic of the Congo: Theological and Pastoral Perspectives after 50 Years” (Kinshasa: 2011), pp. 2, 11.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

dioceses in Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania,³⁶⁸ Uganda and Zambia. SCCs have not gotten off the ground in some dioceses in Eritrea, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan for various political, social and cultural reasons. An exception is the Apostolic Vicariate of Soddo in Ethiopia where Mejia pioneered transforming the parishes into a communion of SCCs model of church.³⁶⁹ Every year he sponsored a Lumko Course for pastoral agents of his diocese and other dioceses in Ethiopia that takes place at the Galilee Center in Debre Zeit.

Our diocese by diocese evaluation is especially helped by the reports of Diocesan Synods and Diocesan Pastoral Plans. A Case Study is Mombasa Archdiocese in Kenya. In *Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa Pastoral Policy* Chapter Two is on “Small Christian Communities.” It clearly states: “All Christians in the Catholic Archdiocese of Mombasa should be members of the SCCs.” This chapter has sections on “Composition,” “Duties of SCCs leaders,” and “Qualities of SCCs Leaders” with appropriate recommendations. It faced the financial question directly by stating: “We highly recommend that appropriate ways approved by the Deanery Pastoral Council (DPC) for fundraising should be established and not use SCCs to raise money as this may discourage people from coming to the SCCs.” A formal Archdiocesan Synod is planned for late 2014 or early 2015.

It is important that the AMECEA bishops themselves speak and write about SCCs. Many bishops in Eastern Africa emphasize the importance of Small Christian Communities in their pastoral letters and pastoral plans on the diocesan and national levels and in their books,³⁷⁰ booklets, speeches, homilies and sermons. Cardinal Pengo is known for always regularly referring to SCCs in his pastoral letters, speeches and homilies in Tanzania. In a seminar for priests Kenyan Auxiliary Bishop David Kamau of Nairobi Archdiocese said that SCCs are “the pillar of the church in Nairobi Archdiocese.” Bishop Rodrigo Mejia, formerly Bishop of Sodo Apostolic Vicariate in Ethiopia states that SCCs are different from Traditional Catholic Associations/Movements because SCCs have the whole program of the

³⁶⁸ For a detailed Case Study of one SCC in Tanzania see Joseph Healey, “16 Year (1986-2002) Journey of St. Jude Thaddeus Small Christian Community (SCC) in Tanzania and the World,” San Antonio: Handout No. 3 in “Workshop on International SCC Twinning,” 1 August, 2002, 6 pages.

³⁶⁹ Rodrigo Mejia’s book *We Are the Church: Sharing in Small Christian Communities*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2009 uses stories and questions to challenge the reader to take a fresh look at the Catholic Church in Africa and its life and mission (the deeper issues in the church and society today) from both personal and communal viewpoints. He has also written *The Church in the Neighborhood: Meetings for the Animation of Small Christian Communities*, (the Swahili version is *Kanisa la Kimazingira*), Nairobi: St. Paul Publications Africa, 1992. It is also available as a 43 minute DVD documentary *The Church in the Neighborhood*, Nairobi: Ukweli Video Productions, 1995 with Swahili and Arabic versions.

³⁷⁰ A number of archbishops and bishops in the AMECEA Region have written their academic dissertations and theses on SCCs. For example, Patrick Kalilombe, *From Outstation to Small Christian Communities: A Comparison of Two Pastoral Methods in Lilongwe Diocese* (University of California); Cardinal Protase Rugambwa, the Archbishop of Tabora, Tanzania: *Ministry and Collaboration in Small Christian Communities: Communities in Rulenge Diocese, Tanzania, a Case Study* (Lateran University).

church itself as its aim, SCCs are formed by the whole family and SCC members share the life of the neighborhood and see each other almost every day.³⁷¹ In reflecting on 50 years of AMECEA Ugandan Cardinal Emmanuel Wamala recalled how the bishops unanimously resolved to build the SCCs structure as a pastoral strategy for grassroot evangelization.³⁷² Malawian Archbishop Tarcisius Ziyaye of Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi and Chairman of AMECEA said: “For half a century, evangelization in solidarity has led to significant achievements in the region including the pastoral option of building Small Christian Communities.”³⁷³ A recent example is Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth during an ordination ceremony in Kisumu, Kenya on Saturday, 30 August, 2014:

He urged the priests to encourage the growth of the Small Christian Communities in the church since they are the strength of the Local Church. “Be with the Small Christian Communities, pray with them. These are the families that feed you, these are the families that receive the sacraments, these are the families that bring their children to be baptized.”³⁷⁴

Mejia writes extensively on SCCs. He assesses the AMECEA pastoral priority by considering the good pastoral results as “lights”:

- aspects of neighborhood,
- service,
- collaboration,
- human relationships
- and inculturation.

He describes the difficulties or weaknesses of SCCs as “shadows”:³⁷⁵

- exaggerated/overstressed/imposed role of SCCs,
- poor leadership,
- lack of pastoral and spiritual ongoing formation, and

³⁷¹ Summary of Rodrigo Mejia, *Church in the Neighborhood*, pp. 33-34.

³⁷² Emmanuel Wamala, *AMECEA 50 Years of Evangelization in Solidarity: 1961 – 2011*, Nairobi: AMECEA Secretariat, 2011, p. x.

³⁷³ Tarcisius Ziyaye, *AMECEA Celebrating a Golden Jubilee of Evangelization in Solidarity: Proceedings of the 17th Plenary Assembly at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) 27th June - 6th July, 2011*, Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2011, p. 25.

³⁷⁴ “KENYA: Ten Ordained Priests in Colorful Ceremony,” Catholic Information Service for Africa (CISA) *Email News Bulletin*. Issue No. 67, Wednesday, 3 September, 2014. Available online: <http://cisaneWSafrica.com/kenya-ten-ordained-priests-in-colorful-ceremony>

³⁷⁵ Fritz Lobinger of South Africa states: “Thanks for faithfully pursuing this topic [of SCCs]. Each time you present it there is an improvement. It is now more correct to call it an “evaluation” of the SCCs because not only the successes but also the drawbacks are presented.” Email message to the author dated 12 August, 2014.

- absence of SCCs in the high middle and rich classes).³⁷⁶

An ongoing evaluation that includes both the strengths and weaknesses of SCCs is essential for continuing growth. The SWOT Analysis can be very beneficial. Mwakhwawa states: “Evaluations are crucial to facilitate ongoing formation because they may reveal the gaps and new emerging challenges.”³⁷⁷ Some of the terms used in alphabetical order:

constructive criticism
 critical analysis
 critical assessment
 critical attitude
 critical evaluation
 critical opinion
 critical thinking
 criticism
 criticism offered in a constructive spirit
 critique
 healthy criticism
 polite criticism
 positive criticism
 self-criticism

My personal experience over many years is that Africans, in particular, do not like criticism as such from the outside and do not respond well to it. As a case in point, I produced Catholic radio programs on Radio Tumaini in Dar es Salaam for 12 years (1994-2006). African presenters were never comfortable with criticism of their programs. They took the criticism personally. We were unsuccessful in explaining that the criticism was of the radio program itself (content, style, presentation, voice, etc.), not of the person. Some people though we were making a judgement about or on them. So I have changed to use the word “critique” that is less threatening and has the extended meaning of how to do something better the next time. Fair and constructive critique can help to see problems more clearly and to find better solutions.

Two weaknesses of the Catholic Church in general is:

the lack of self-criticism³⁷⁸

³⁷⁶ Rodrigo Mejia, “Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa 26 Years On: Lights and Shadows” in Patrick Ryan (ed.), *New Strategies for a New Evangelization*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2002.

³⁷⁷ Vincent Mwakhwawa, *Improving Participation of the Laity in Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Challenge in the Archdiocese of Lilongwe*, Nairobi: Unpublished Master’s Thesis, CUEA, 2012, p. 130.

³⁷⁸ American psychologist and theologian Father Donald Cozzens states:

Pope Francis is willing to turn the light of the Gospel on the church itself. *Not* an easy thing to do. The Lutheran theologian Paul Tillich -- some of you have heard of him -- pointed out how difficult it is for the church to turn

the lack of being open to criticism and critiquing from others

These are two distinct but related issues. If a person is not self-critical (that is, being willing to evaluate oneself), he or she will probably not be open to criticism from others. Such a person is probably insecure and likely to take a defensive stand/be defensive. In the African context there are also issues of patriarchy, clericalism and the long tradition of a hierarchical church.

Orobator points out that the official Catholic Church in Africa does not like to be criticized by others. African Bishops do not like to be critiqued by African theologians.

Kalilombe, one the architects of the SCC plan in Eastern Africa, states:

A spirit of self-criticism in how things are going on in SCCs helps the community to grow...If members feel at home in their SCCs, they will feel free to put forward their opinions on how they think things should be done. Thus they give leaders insights on where and how to improve things in SCCs.³⁷⁹

Cameroon Sister Kenyuyfoon Gloria Wirba identifies the following shortcomings of SCCs in sub-Sahara Africa: gap between well planned programs and uneven implementation; exaggerated ethnocentrism; completion between SCCs and new religious movements in parishes; SCC leaders and animators are more concerned about power and control than ministerial service; and danger of SCCs becoming social and political action groups.³⁸⁰

the light of the Gospel on itself. Here's what Tillich wrote: "If the church does not subject itself to the judgment, which is pronounced *by* the church, it becomes idolatrous to itself. Such idolatry is its permanent temptation. A church which tries to exclude itself from such a judgment loses its right to judge the world, and is rightly judged by the world." Then Tillich added these painful words: "This is the tragedy of the Roman Catholic Church." We take the light of the Gospel, and we judge the world by it; but we seem slow to turn that same light on ourselves, and judge ourselves by it; *and so the world is judging us*. Francis understands that the world is indeed judging the church; and the world's verdict is cutting to the heart of the Church's integrity. So in his extraordinary *Apostolic Exhortation: The Joy of the Gospel*, Francis writes, "Since I am called to put into practice what I ask others, I too must think about a conversion of the papacy." So we have Francis turning the light of the Gospel on the papacy itself. Unheard of! Can we imagine a day when church authorities might say about a given teaching, "We were wrong about that." I think Pope Francis can.

Donald Cozzens, "New Pope, New Hope: Out from the Underground," Westland, Michigan, Unpublished Talk, 17 September, 2014.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁰ Summary of Kenyuyfoon Gloria Wirba, *Women and Inculturated Evangelization in Africa*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications – CUEA Press Double *Spearhead* Nos. 201-204 (2013), pp. 184-185.

In the evaluation and assessment of SCCs in the AMECEA Region, research on the participation of priests³⁸¹ is mixed. On the open statement -- “The priests...” we have heard a wide range of comments (including the exact words) listed below from the negative/critical to the positive/complimentary ranging from:

Priests can be one the biggest obstacles in the growth of SCCs;
 lack of interest and involvement of priests is the biggest obstacle;
 are guilty of clerical manipulation such as naming members to the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC);
 dominate and control the SCCs (like wanting to preach during a SCC Mass in a home);
 SCCs have become only the extended arm of the parish priest;
 don't allow lay participation in *Jumuiya* Masses,
 superiority complex on the part of the priest when he wants to provide all the answers;
 fear that educated lay people know more than they do;
 inferiority complex of the priest when he fears his own Christians;
 feel threatened by the lay people who question the priest and also want to take too much control and responsibility;
 feel threatened by the SCCs Model of Church;
 are involved in a tug of war between themselves and the lay leaders over control of the SCC;
 are too concerned about their authority;
 don't want to let go of their power and control;
 see SCCs as an improper way of democratizing the church;
 see SCCs as colleges of piety;
 don't understand and appreciate collaborative ministry;
 feel resistance to collaborative ministry;
 who are not introduced to SCCs in their training do not appreciate their value.
 are concerned that there is too much work in animating SCC;
 are sensitive to the criticism that they favor certain SCCs;
 don't hear the truth because lay people are afraid to criticize priests even if they are wrong;
 use the SCCs too much for fundraising in the parish. Reality of “Father Pesa” (“Father Money”), “*Michango* Church” (“Collections Church”), “*Jumuiya ya Pesa*” (“Small Community of Money”), overuse of *Harambees* and SCCs as a small bank; tend to favor, and cater to, the rich SCC members;
 use SCCs as cash-cows;
 turn SCCs into ATM cards;
 use SCCs as fund-raising organ;
 put fund-raising burdens on SCCs members;
 can be a "milking cow" when the pastor loses sight of the mission of the church.
 many people tend to leave SCCs because their some of their pastors are using them

³⁸¹ Fritz Lobinger states: “I also hear that the priests [in South Africa] are no longer as enthusiastic about Small Christian Communities as they were thirty years ago. The bishops know about the value of SCCs and try to promote them but they find it difficult.” Email message to the author dated 12 August, 2014.

as a means of getting money for themselves. Some Xtians say that SCCs have changed to be groups for pastors to use to enrich themselves. And I think that's why most men do not attend SCCs;³⁸²

we African priests try to get extra money through the SCCs;

impose a SCCs compulsory policy such as parents have to be members so their children can be baptized that prompts a negative reaction from the laity;

are more interested in a development model of church than a pastoral model of church;

complain that there is no diocesan pastoral policy on SCCs, no funds to implement any policy and SCCs are not on the agenda of diocesan meetings;

ask for a coordinated pastoral strategy of SCCs on the diocesan and parish level;

don't understand the theology and pastoral priority of SCCs;

don't have enough time for the lay people;

don't recognize the priest's important role in training lay people in the *Bible* and church teachings;

show no interest in SCCs;

are afraid to start SCCs because successor may not continue them or may allow them to have a slow death;

are neutral (saying that lay people can have any parish organizations that they want);

see SCCs as optional -- just another organization or program in the parish.

see SCCs as merely a more efficient and effective way of running their parishes;

try to encourage more lay participation in SCCs while laity are still passive in a clerical church;

show real interest in the life and activities of the SCCs;

feel SCCs are very important, even essential, for the parish;

depend on SCCs in animating and coordinating the parish;

feel that belonging to one particular SCC as an ordinary member is important;

listen to the views of the SCC members;

should be animators, not bosses;

interest of the priest in SCCs is essential and supportive;

celebrate SCC Masses on a regular rotation basis (but some priests do nothing else in the SCC);

appreciate collaborative ministry;

are necessary for the success of SCCs in parishes;³⁸³

cannot animate and coordinate the parish without the help of SCCs;

dioceses should invest in sending priests to do the LUMKO Course on SCCs;

³⁸² Tanzanian diocesan priest Father Edwin Makusanya wrote his MA Thesis in the Institute of Social Ministry in Mission at Tangaza University College on *Efficient Management of Economic Resources in Parishes as a Way to Achieve Self-Reliance: A Case Study of Tabora and Sikonge Parishes, Archdiocese of Tabora, Tanzania*. His research included how SCCs help promote self-reliance in a parish. He says: "If priests use SCCs collections for their own use this will kill self-reliance in the parish." Conversation with the author in Nairobi dated 12 November, 2013.

³⁸³ A lay person in Immaculate Conception Parish, Upanga, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania said that it is very important for the priest to teach about SCCs and to visit the SCCs. He said that if the priest says nothing about SCCs, this communicates to the lay people that SCCs are not important, that they are optional, that they are just another organization in the parish.

feel training of seminarians (before ordination) in this SCCs model of church is essential;
see SCCs as a new way of being/becoming church.³⁸⁴

In a talk to the priests of Dar es Salaam Archdiocese in 2006 Bishop Method Kilaini, the then Auxiliary Bishop, emphasized that the best way for them to know their parishioners is to visit the SCCs on a regular basis. By visiting the SCC members in their homes the priests can experience the people's lives from the inside. Davies states: "Regular visits by the priest to the SCCs prove to be excellent in bringing the priest close to his people and the people to their priest. A good priest (and we are all good priests!) will really delight in promoting the laity to catechise themselves in their meetings."³⁸⁵ Kenyan diocesan priest Father Joseph Ngala says that SCCs help the Parish Priest to know the spiritual and material needs of the Christians and to appreciate the different economic and social classes in the parish especially the gap between the rich and the poor. This helps him to design a realistic and practical pastoral plan.³⁸⁶

This is echoed by Pope Francis who urges the world's priests to bring the healing power of God's grace to everyone in need, to stay close to the marginalized and to be "shepherds living with the smell of the sheep."³⁸⁷ The pope explains this further in No. 24 of *The Joy of the Gospel* in the section on "A Church Which Goes Forth:"

An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on [have] the "smell of the sheep"³⁸⁸ and the sheep are willing to hear their voice. An evangelizing community is also supportive, standing by people at every step of the way, no matter how difficult or lengthy this may prove to be.

Part of our call as missionary disciples is to smell like the sheep/take on the smell of the sheep that struggle on the territorial and existential peripheral outskirts.

³⁸⁴ Based on conversations with many bishops, priests, brothers, sisters and SCCs lay animators and leaders in Eastern Africa together with their written reports and comments.

³⁸⁵ Colin Davies, *From Pilot to Pastoral Bishop*, p. 112.

³⁸⁶ Joseph Ngala in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya, 15 August, 2014.

³⁸⁷ Carol Glatz, "Pope Francis: Priests Should Be 'Shepherds Living with the Smell of The Sheep,'" *Catholic News Service*, 28 March, 2013, retrieved from the *Catholic Telegraph Website* on 128 March, 2013 <http://www.thecatholictelegraph.com/pope-francis-priests-should-be-shepherds-living-with-the-smell-of-the-sheep/13439>

³⁸⁸ It is significant that at the panel on "The Bishop in the Church of Pope Francis" at the Theological Colloquium on Church, Religion and Society in Africa (TCCRSA) in Nairobi on 7 August, 2014 all three bishops referred to the importance of pastoral shepherds having the smell of the sheep on themselves and pastoral workers.

In another talk the pope said that "real contact" with the poor is necessary to understand poverty: "This is very important to me: the need to become acquainted with reality by experience, to spend time walking on the periphery in order [to] really become acquainted with the reality and life experiences of people. If this does not happen we then run the risk of being abstract ideologists or fundamentalists, which is not healthy."³⁸⁹ Thus all SCCs animators and facilitators should regularly smell the sheep on the local level and even have/take on the smell of the sheep/smell like the sheep.

In evaluating his achievements in the last five years in Embu Diocese Kenyan Bishop Paul Kariuki states:

I have been able to visit every Small Christian Community in this diocese. I know exactly where they are, what they are doing, what is happening there. I am in touch with the reality on the ground.³⁹⁰

Our evaluation shows that many priests support SCCs but others do not. The pattern is not consistent. In any given diocese you can expect SCCs coordination and training programs in some parishes, but other parishes are left out. One solution in Eastern Africa is to run a SCCs training program/workshop on the local Catholic radio station. Then all lay people have to opportunity to listen and learn.

Everyone agrees that seminarians should be introduced to the importance of SCCs during their seminary formation and training including the time of their pastoral work in the parishes and not wait until they are already priests. The retired Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki of Nairobi Archdiocese said: “Our seminarians in Kenya must have courses and workshops on SCCs during their seminary training. It is too late if we wait until after they are ordained.”³⁹¹

In the original AMECEA plan of building SCCs in the 1970s catechists were not the leaders of SCCs, but rather the animators similar to priests, brothers and sisters. After many years of having a special status as “the priest’s Boy Friday,” this was a new role that they found difficult. Traditionally the catechists sometimes wanted to be set apart and be “over” the SCC lay leaders. Through training programs organized by SCC Founding Fathers such as Mwoleka, catechists gradually learned their new role including being ordinary members of a specific SCC in their neighborhood. But even today some catechists like a special status as confirmed by some priests including American Maryknoll priest Father Donald Sybertz, MM in Shinyanga.³⁹²

³⁸⁹ Pope Francis in Joshua J. McElwee, “Francis Tells Religious to 'Wake the World,' Outlines Modern Struggles for Church,” *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR), |3 January, 2014, *National Catholic Reporter Website*, retrieved 4 January, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/francis-tells-religious-wake-world-outlines-modern-struggles-church>

³⁹⁰ National Mirror Team, “One-One With the Bishop of Embu Rt. Rev. Paul Kariuki, *National Mirror*, 10/14 (October, 2014), p. 11.

³⁹¹ Raphael Ndingi in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya in 2007.

³⁹² Donald Sybertz in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 23 April, 2013.

This evaluation has studied carefully the important role of youth in SCCs.³⁹³ Given the importance of youth in the demographics of both the general population and the Catholic population in Africa, the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Second African Synod did not give enough attention to youth in Africa. A single section -- Number 27 -- in *Message of the Bishops of Africa to the People of God*– treats youth after priests, religious, lay faithful, Catholics in public life, families, women and men. It states: “You are not just the future of the Church: you are with us already in big numbers. In many countries of Africa, over 60% of the population is under 25. The ratio in the Church would not be much different.” But the message could have said much more. *Proposition 48* treats youth in a problem-centered way saying that the Synod Fathers “are deeply concerned about the plight of youth” and proposes various recommendations. Much more could have been said about the great potential of young people in the Catholic Church and in the general society in Africa.

The Apostolic Exhortation *Africa’s Commitment* is more positive and expansive. Especially in Number 63 on “Young People” the pope encourages young people to “active and enthusiastic participation in ecclesial groups and movements. Cultivate a yearning for fraternity,³⁹⁴ justice and peace...the future is in your hands.”

Due to African cultural traditions, African youth normally do not speak in public in front of adults. Youth do not usually actively participate in Adult SCCs in Eastern Africa. Thus, it is crucial to form specific Youth SCCs (or YSCCs) that give young people a specific voice and role and to encourage them to plan their own discussions, reflections and activities.

During the Mwanza Metropolitan Workshop on the theme “Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Embrace the Word of God” at the St. Dominic Pastoral Centre in Mwanza, Tanzania from 19 to 22 May, 2014 there was a spirited discussion on the advisability of Youth SCCs. A number of delegates who because of their age or their involvement in the Catholic Church in only rural areas of northwestern Tanzania were against Youth SCCs. They stressed that this would create a gap between parents and youth, between the elders’ values/supervision of youth and the youth themselves. Youth would go off on their own and be influenced by the negative aspects of our secular and postmodern world.

But Bishop Method Kilaini and Sister Rita Ishengoma explained that this would not happen if the Youth SCCs (and even Children SCCs like PMC) would be formed within the overall *Mama* SCC in a particular geographical area. There would be an ongoing link and mutual communication. Sometimes the Adult SCC and the Youth SCC would meet together. They gave examples in Lusaka, Zambia, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Nairobi, Kenya and Mombasa, Kenya where adult SCC members serve as advisors or guardians of the Youth SCCs and Children SCCs. An adult man is the Patron and an adult woman is the Matron.

³⁹³ Our SCCs Website (<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>) has a user friendly Search Feature. A Search on 29 September, 2014 shows: If you search for “youth” you get 46 hits (visits). If you search for “young people” you get 29 hits (visits). If you search for “young adults” you get 13 hits (visits).

³⁹⁴ Fraternity is a word that needs to be changed to inclusive (nonsexist) language like “brotherhood and sisterhood.” To 95% of the youth in the USA “fraternity” refers to the social club and residence for young men on college campuses. The equivalent for young women is “sorority.”

Alphonse Omolo writes:

The idea of *Mama* or *Baba* SCCs in our experience in Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya includes the "Fish Guardians". An adult is nominated by a specific Fish Youth Community to provide guardianship in the spiritual and the social perspectives. The Fish Guardians are trained during a workshop on how to provide such guardianship to the specific communities. This is worth exploring and building further contextualized understanding -- how such individuals can be understood in the YSCCs and the Adults SCCs.³⁹⁵

Theologically, this is within the context of communion ecclesiology. Beginning with the family as the Domestic Church, a SCC is a communion of families. The *Mama* SCC can include different branches such as the Adult SCC, the Youth SCC and the Children SCC. These small communities meet both together and separately depending on the local situation.

In one parish in Monze Diocese, Zambia youth meet as part of the "Mama SCC." There is a common *Bible* reading for everyone. Then they go into specific groups with prepared questions: a teenage group; a young adult group; and a married young adult group. At the end they come back together into the full SCC for announcements and closing prayers.

A survey among young people in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Mwanza, Tanzania, Lilongwe, Malawi, Lusaka, Zambia and Nairobi, Kenya and reinforced by interviews with young people in the USA revealed that their favorite discussion topics in their YSCCs meetings are:

- Topics clustered around boy-girl relationships, sex,³⁹⁶ dating, fashion, popular music, video games, social networks, information technology, sports and the use of leisure time. Kenyan layman Steven Juma says:

I spent a lot of time going to church, *jumuiya*, fellowship and all kinds of Small Christian Communities where we talked about everything from feeding the poor to Jesus forgiving the prostitutes. We talked about everything but sex. Yet most of my Christian formation happened in a Small Christian Community... We have to talk about sex in an honest, candid way, and that talk has to start in our Small Christian Communities because we are not going to hear it at the 10.30 mass on Sunday.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁵ Alphonse Omolo in a email to the author, 28 April, 2017.

³⁹⁶ In our SCCs Class at Tangaza in March, 2016 the students (mostly seminarians) were reluctant to mention sex as one of the African youths' favorite topic (as though it was not proper). Finally the sole priest in the class said, "Let's say it openly. Youth want to talk about sex."

During research on university and college campuses in the USA, the topic "sex" was widened to include LGBTQ -- lesbians, gays, bisexuals, transgendered, queer people.

³⁹⁷ Steven Juma, St. Gonzaga Gonza SCC Youth Group Website, retrieved on 20 July, 2013, https://www.Facebook.com/groups/gonzagagonzascc/494064024005727/?notif_t=group_comment_reply

Kenyan university student Alloys Nyakundi reports:

YSCCs are very important in the contemporary world where many things are happening to the youth without the knowledge of their parents and elders. If you want to catch a thief you set another thief. In our Meru Diocese SCCs Workshop the youth who attended told me that they are shy to openly talk about some important and crucial issues, for example sex, in front of their parents and elders since it's a taboo in the African traditions.³⁹⁸

- Whole area of searching for one's human and Christian identity and self-discovery in a Faith-sharing context. What are youth's aspirations and dreams?³⁹⁹ This includes vocational discernment (covering religious vocations and vocations in the secular world.) This touches career planning,⁴⁰⁰ job hunting and the challenges of employment/unemployment.

- Involvement in justice and peace issues. In his research American theologian Father Bernard Lee, SM makes a valuable distinction that applies to African Youth SCCs summarized as follows:

Full Christianhood is necessarily gathered and sent—community and mission belong together. I can say clearly that while traditional SCC members (the elder groups) do care about the shape of the world outside of their gathering, they tend to be more attentive to being gathered than to being sent (in mission). Some of us are guessing that for today's young adult Catholics, "sending" will attract attention sooner than "gathering." Young adults deserve some prioritized attention *vis-à-vis* their social agency in the world, and base communities are a way of connecting social agency with sound Christian hearts, heads, and feet.⁴⁰¹

- How to answer challenges from their Protestant friends especially Pentecostals on the *Bible*, Catholic Church teachings, etc. Recent research shows this is the main reason that African Catholic youth want to learn more about the *Bible*.

- Fund raising projects (money). This included emphasis on long range

³⁹⁸ Alloys Nyakundi in a email to the author, 28 April, 2017.

³⁹⁹ At a workshop at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya on Saturday, 5 November, 2016 the title of my interactive presentation was: "Positive Use of the Social Media: Suggestions on How Students at Kenyatta University Can Use Their Leisure Time Better." I began by asking the students in buzz groups of two each to discuss the question: "What gets me up in the morning?" "Why do I get up in the morning?" Then we shared our answers in the whole group of about 70 students.

⁴⁰⁰ Research in USA indicate that university and college students and graduates want to talk about how to pay off their student loans.

⁴⁰¹ Bernard Lee, "Young Adults Gathered & Sent or Sent & Gathered," in Moerschbacher, *Proceedings of the International Symposium*, pp. 2-3.

goals and achievements and how to be financially successful in life.

- Generation gap – communications problems between themselves and their parents.
- Politics – always a fascinating topic especially connected to election time in African countries.
- Culture including African ethnic group identity and challenges and pop culture especially in cities.

This present evaluation documents many examples of the growing importance of women in SCCs. African women are challenging the patriarchal style in both traditional African culture and in traditional Catholic Church leadership. In 1992 the author was invited to give a Public Lecture at CUEA on “Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa.” Since lay people are the heart of SCCs I agree to speak only if a lay woman could co-present with me. Mrs. Rose Musimba, the former Chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council of Holy Trinity Parish, Buruburu I, Nairobi and a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team, eloquently explained the central role of the laity in SCCs in Eastern Africa. After the lecture a Malawian priest who was studying at CUEA came up to the front and told Rose she was the first woman Chairperson of a Parish Council that he had ever met. In the last 20 years this has changed dramatically and now many committed Catholic lay women are in leadership positions on the diocesan, parish, outstation and SCC levels.

The lack of participation and involvement of men in SCCs in Eastern Africa is also well documented throughout this evaluation and assessment. Charles Ddungu’s research pointed out that from the very initial steps of launching SCCs in Tabora Archdiocese, Tanzania many considered them only prayer groups or *Bible* Sharing Groups. The exclusion of the human development aspects is one of the major reasons why men and the youth abandoned the SCCs.⁴⁰²

At the Second Theological Colloquium on Church, Religion and Society in Africa (TCCRSA II) in Nairobi, Kenya in August, 2014 part of the discussion focused on concrete pastoral solutions. Regarding the obstacle that only a few men come to the SCCs, someone joked that in Nairobi Archdiocese that now has 4,537 SCCs when a SCC meeting includes a meal many men come. When beer is served all the men come. It was pointed out that men don’t like long prayer services, but practical projects such as service to others and self-help projects attract men. Men also want the weekly *Bible* Service to start on time and don’t like just sitting around waiting.

The last five years has seen the slow, gradual shift of SCCs in Eastern Africa from being small prayer groups that are inwardly focused to active Small Faith Communities that are outwardly focused including justice and peace issues. This may be the number one challenge to SCCs in Eastern Africa. Many are still prayer groups (emphasizing especially

⁴⁰² Charles Ddungu, *Towards Self-Ministering Small Christian Communities: the Case of Ndala Parish*, Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Brussels: Catholic University of Louvain, 2005.

the rosary and popular devotions)⁴⁰³ and not concerned with the wider social issues. Many SCCs still shy away from justice and peace concerns. The challenge of Ugandan historian/theologian Father John Waliggo (who died in 2008) and Magesa has encouraged the SCCs in Africa to become more involved in justice and peace issues and social action.

Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, the deceased bishop of Rulenge Diocese who was the founder of SCCs in Tanzania, already saw this challenge in the 1980s when he identified the pressing need for an effective and inculturated method of *Bible* Reflection in Eastern Africa that gets beyond the small prayer group model. Just as Africa needs an "appropriate technology" for economic development, it needs an "appropriate methodology" for *Bible* Reflection that connects the *Bible* to the real issues of our daily life and includes Faith-sharing. He called this "finding the African bait."⁴⁰⁴

Orobator sums up the history as follows:

Some theologians have pointed out that a major drawback of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and parishes in Africa lies in their predilection for caritative options in response to social issues to the detriment of the more structural ones. According to Uzukwu: "It is...symptomatic of the SCCs that group reflections rarely touch areas of social action, but rather emphasize the caritative dimension."⁴⁰⁵ Joseph Donders also makes the point that, in contrast to the Latin American experience of Basic Ecclesial Communities, "In Africa the Small Christian Communities do not politicize. They are trying to find political survival in an over-politicized world."⁴⁰⁶ A more accurate assessment of this situation allows us to say that these communities comprise men and women who have been catechized in quietist and devotional piety, prone to fatalistic acceptance of their conditions of oppression, poverty and misery.⁴⁰⁷

Fortunately, this situation is changing. One important reason for this positive shift is the use of an inductive, contextual Pastoral Theological Reflection (PTR) Process/Method

⁴⁰³ Research in the rural areas of Luganda speaking dioceses of Uganda such as a Masaka Diocese in 2013 indicate that SCCs mainly meet in May and October for the rosary and devotions to the Blessed Mary. Ugandan layman Richard Kakeeto, conversation with author in Nairobi, Kenya, 26 November, 2013.

⁴⁰⁴ Joseph Healey, "The Need for an Effective Bible Reflection Method in SCCs in Africa," *Biblical Pastoral Bulletin*, 8 (1989), 28-29. *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)* 37/3 (May, 1995), 156-159. Another version is Joseph G. Healey, "Finding the African Bait," *New People*, 6-9 (1990), 10-11.

⁴⁰⁵ Uzukwu, *A Listening Church, Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996, p.118.

⁴⁰⁶ Joseph Donders, *Non-Bourgeois Theology: An African Experience of Jesus*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985, p. 173.

⁴⁰⁷ A. E. Orobator, *The Church as Family: African Ecclesiology in its Social Context*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000, pp. 145-146.

such as the "Pastoral Spiral"⁴⁰⁸ in SCCs that helps the members to go deeper and make concrete changes in our lives. This Pastoral Spiral (also known as the Pastoral Circle and the Pastoral Cycle⁴⁰⁹) uses the four steps of:

1. Insertion (into concrete pastoral experience)
2. Social/Cultural Analysis
3. Theological Reflection
4. Action/Pastoral Planning

Another version is the five steps of:

1. Experience
2. Social/Cultural Analysis
3. Theological Reflection
4. Pastoral Planning
5. Evaluation.⁴¹⁰

Still another version is Dutch lay missiologist Frans Wijzen, SMS's practical--theological spiral:

1. Observation.
2. Interpretation.
3. Evaluation.
4. Innovation.

The term "Pastoral Spiral" is preferred because it showed the ongoing-ness of the process or method. It is well known in pastoral theology, social ministry and formation programs. The full process has been tested in SCCs in Eastern Africa and found to be too complex to fit the needs of the short time frame of a weekly SCC meeting (one hour to one and a half hours at the most) and the educational background of lay members. But it has been successfully adapted to the three steps of the well-known "See," "Judge" and "Act"

⁴⁰⁸ See the African examples in Frans Wijzen, Peter Henriot and Rodrigo Mejia (eds.), *The Pastoral Circle Revisited: A Critical Quest for Truth and Transformation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005 and Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006.

⁴⁰⁹ See the video series *Pastoral Cycle Methodology for Social Transformation*. Nairobi: Institute of Social Ministry, Tangaza, 2015.

⁴¹⁰ These five steps of the Pastoral Spiral are clearly described in Malawian Montfort Seminarian Peter Makina's Case Study of St. Louis Montfort SCC in Sitima Parish, Zomba Diocese, Malawi. Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 24 June, 2013 at: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/africa/malawi/242-using-the-pastoral-spiral-see-judge-and-act-process-in-sccs-in-africa.html>

process/method^{411 412} starting from concrete experience. Many SCCs begin with the step of brief reports on the members' lives during the past week (called a “touchdown period” or

⁴¹¹ American Maryknoll priest Rafael Davila, MM points out the history of “the Jocist -- a widely used term that comes from the French acronym JOC -- *Jeunesse ouvrière chrétienne* or Young Christian Workers [YCW] that was an international organization founded by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn in Belgium in 1924. The Jocist method of “See,” “Judge” and Act” is a method of spirituality.” He summarizes his views as follows:

- To grow personally, as a family and as a faith community/community of faith.
- To practice personal reflection, communication and dialog as a couple, as a family and as a faith community/community of faith.
- To use the method as a spiritual guide:
- To see, analyze and contemplate the reality of our life with the eyes of the mystery of faith including the Paschal Mystery and the Mystery of the Trinity.
- To judge, critique, evaluate, enlighten and encounter Jesus in our reality with the Word of God in the communion of love.
- To act, decide and be transformed in our commitments with a mission of joyful hope.

Rafael Davila conversation with the author, Houston Texas, 3 October, 2015.

American Bishop Robert McElroy calls for an ever contemporary application:

Powerful pathway of past Catholic movements of “see, act, judge”: to see the situation clearly, to judge with principles that foster the integral development of people and to act in a way which implements these principles in the light of everyone’s unique situation. The simple but rich architecture constructed by these principles guided Catholic social actions in the past century in Europe and Latin America. But these words which carry with them such a powerful history of social transformation around the world in the service of the dignity of the human person must be renewed and re-examined in every age and seen against the background of those social, economic, and political forces in each historical moment. So let us see and judge and act. Let us disrupt and rebuild. And let us do God’s work.

Robert McElroy in Brian, Roewe, “In Powerful Speech San Diego Bishop Challenges Organizers To Disrupt, Rebuild, *NCR Website*, revived 20 February, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/justice/powerful-speech-san-diego-bishop-challenges-organizers-disrupt-rebuild>

The unexamined life is not worth living (Ancient Greek: ὁ ... ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ) is a famous dictum apparently uttered by Socrates at his trial for impiety and corrupting youth. He was subsequently sentenced to death, as described in Plato's *Apology* (38a5-6). He felt knowing oneself is the key to life and came from the dialogic method: *Elenchus* (Ancient Greek: ἔλεγχος, translit. *elengkhos*, lit. “argument of disproof or refutation; cross-examining, testing, scrutiny esp. for purposes of refutation”) that is the central technique of the Socratic method. He choose death (drinking the poisonous hemlock) so he could continue *elenchus* in the afterlife rather than being forced into exile away from Athens where he could not practice well this method.

“catch up period”). This includes a report on the SCC's actions/tasks (community response) carried out during the previous week. Other SCCs take a concrete experience, incident or story as the starting point of a weekly meeting.

Now more and more SCCs in Africa are using various reflection processes and methods to pastorally and theologically reflect on their experiences, often using the tools of social analysis. This includes both identifying the new signs of the times and creatively responding to them with concrete actions.⁴¹³ Through their use of the “See,” “Judge” and “Act” process,⁴¹⁴ small communities move out into the world in a dialog with the daily way of life. Using this methodology SCCs are well suited to make real changes and have a real impact in transforming our world.

But it is not easy as Ngalula point out:

The instability of countries in Africa provoke a massive rush to some devotional groups in the Catholic Church or to the promises of miracle in the New Religious Movements that both teach people that the solution will come only from God in exchange of long prayers. This is a big competition for the BCCs that seem rather stern with their "See," "Judge" and "Act" method that prevents people from escaping the hard realities of life to take refuge in the spiritual practices. Some people prefer to choose the way of easiness and quit the BCCs.⁴¹⁵

An example of a reflection process/method: One of the eight Gospel Sharing Methods in the Lumko Series is the Group Response Method (or *Bible-Mirror Method*) that is described on pages 647-649. It aims at seeing daily situations and problems reflected in the biblical text. It makes the Gospel a driving force in talking about life issues. This method holds up the Scripture text (such as the Gospel of the following Sunday) as a kind of mirror in which the SCC members can recognize their own problems and situations of daily life. It helps SCC members to look beyond their immediate personal spiritual needs to the wider church and society. It is very practical and pastoral:

Parish Liturgical Committees could use Group Response to prepare the Sunday Liturgy. It will assist them in finding the *Sitz im Leben* (German for

⁴¹²Research indicates that young people in Eastern Africa who have experienced these “See,” “Judge and “Act” steps in the Young Christian Students (YCS) and Young Christian Workers (YCW) Movements are more confident and better qualified to use them in SCCs.

⁴¹³ A practical book that explains the methodology and dynamics of the Pastoral Circle in an African context is Patrick Ryan (ed.), *New Strategies for a New Evangelization*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2002.

⁴¹⁴ This process operates at different levels. For example, a Diocesan Synod Report or Diocesan Pastoral Letter or Bishop’s Pastoral Letter can be a pastoral or theological lens through which the life and ministries of a diocese, such as the SCCs Pastoral Priority, can be viewed and evaluated.

⁴¹⁵ Ngalula in Moerschbacher, *Proceedings of the International Symposium*, p. 12.

"setting in life") or *hali halisi* (Swahili for local situation) of a particular text of the *Bible*. In other words, it helps them find which life situation of a local community is reflected in the biblical text. This will also help the preacher in his homily to address the real problems of a local community allowing the people to find together with him or her "what God thinks about it."⁴¹⁶

Good Case Studies of the Pastoral Spiral are the theses and essays on the obstacle or challenge of the size of the SCC being too big -- in some cases 100-200 people/ 50 families. In 2016 at Tangaza University College in Nairobi one Master's Thesis in Pastoral Ministry (Meru Diocese, Kenya) and one long essay (Binga Diocese, DRC) addressed this issue. The **social and cultural analysis step** can dig deeper into the meaning and practice of African community life and extended families. The **theological reflection step** can pinpoint how a small community of Catholics in the neighborhood is an official ecclesial unit within the parish pastoral structure. The **action step** can divide the big community into manageable SCCs where 15-20 members participate in the weekly meetings.

Three specific examples of the successful use of this "See," "Judge" and "Act" process/method in promoting justice and peace are as follows: First, the booklets in English and Swahili for the annual Kenya Lenten Campaign produced by the Kenya Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (described throughout this book and listed in the "Select Annotated Bibliography").

Second, the ministry and publications of the Jesuit Center for Theological Reflection (JCTR) in Lusaka, Zambia. Henriot writes:

To strengthen the life of the SCCs, the Jesuit Center for Theological Reflection has in recent years developed some small pamphlets for use by these [SCCs] groups during their weekly meetings. The purpose of the pamphlets is to provide a resource for guided reflection that can generate faith-based action. The Pastoral Circle serves as the framework for the pamphlets.⁴¹⁷

Examples are *What is the Church's Social Teaching Saying about Poverty?* (JCTR, 2003) and *Traditional Healing: A Pastoral Challenge for the Catholic Church in Zambia* (JCTR, 2004).⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁶ Oswald Hirmer, *The Pastoral Use of the Bible: Gospel Sharing Methods*, No. 20 of the Series "Training for Community Members," Germiston, South Africa: Lumko, 2003, p. 52.

⁴¹⁷ Peter Henriot, *Pastoral Circle Revisited*, p. 39.

⁴¹⁸ See Bboloka Bubala Nchimunya, SJ's Ph.D Dissertation topic at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, A Graduate School of Santa Clara University: "Inculturating CST in SCC: A Necessary Paradigm of Evangelization In Zambia." He explains: "CST is not known by most Zambian Catholics because it is not easily made available to them. Since the Zambian Catholic formation is little or not there at all after confirmation lessons, CST has not been integrated or taught to most Catholics. Hence the term: Catholic Social Teaching of the Catholic Church as the "Best Kept Secret." Therefore, I argue that inculturating CST in SCC

Third, the various reflection methods especially related to social justice in the Lumko series program such as the “Amos Program for Small Christian Communities” found on page 331. These programs search for the root causes of common problems leading to social action:

The Amos Program is a form of *Bible* Sharing in five steps where the *Bible* is read in the context of everyday life realities of the people of our time. The starting point in each case is a concrete social or political problem -- poverty, unemployment, corruption, drug use, HIV AND AIDS, violence, prostitution, etc. -- that is then analyzed in light of the *Bible* and of the Christian Tradition. But participants do not stop at the steps of analysis and interpretation. Instead, they move on to develop viable solutions that are as realistic and practical as possible. By so doing they make it possible for life relationships to improve step by step.⁴¹⁹

Unfortunately, these excellent Lumko materials have not been updated to read and respond to the contemporary “Signs of the Time” with new stories, examples and references in newer church documents such as the First and Second African Synods and other key Vatican documents. Now we could add: the Apostolic Exhortations and Encyclicals of Pope Francis.

One concrete fruit of all the materials described above is to develop a spirituality of justice and peace in all our apostolic activities.⁴²⁰ This had led to a new social consciousness

will enable many Christians in Zambia to access these informative documents. It will indeed become a new paradigm for evangelization for Catholics in Zambia. I believe SCC is an appropriate platform for most Christians to learn, share or teach these important documents from Mother Church.” Email dated 8 April, 2014.

⁴¹⁹ "The Amos Program: Prophetic Action in the World of Today," *Catholic Biblical Federation (CBF) Newsletter*, Edition 4/2007.

⁴²⁰ An important and influential book for many years in Eastern Africa is Anne Hope and Sally Timmel, *Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers*, 3 volumes, Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1984. These volumes have helped two generations of Africans to begin with their personal and communal experience (as done in the “See” Step or “Insertion” of the Pastoral Circle). The books are excellent for justice formation and provide useful group exercises and group dynamics related to the question: How can SCC members be agents of change and social transformation? Margaret Mead, the American cultural anthropologist, said: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed, citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

Training for Transformation can be described as a great river originating in a number of different springs. These sources were joined together initially in the Delta Training Program of team training for development workers, started in Kenya by Anne Hope and Sally Timmel in 1973. Since then numerous tributaries bringing new insights and skills have contributed effective ways of enabling local communities to improve the quality of their lives in the ways they choose. The leadership skills and methodology of DELTA (Development Education for Leaders and Trainers Action) and TtT (Training for Trainers) have irrigated and brought new life to different fields: including Health, Agriculture, Literacy,

on the local level. One recent development is SCCs members in Eastern Africa being more involved in civic education and political processes like awareness of political issues before and during elections. For example, in Kenya a significant turning point was the post-election crisis in Kenya in January-February, 2008. Using the "See," "Discern" and "Act" process during the Kenya Lenten Campaign 2008 SCCs members dramatically discovered how much tribalism and negative ethnicity existed in their SCCs on the local level.⁴²¹ This led to concrete actions such as: one-on-one sessions in which one person would share a traumatic/painful/difficult experience (most frequently a personal experience) that took place after the 27 December, 2007 Kenyan elections. It was usually connected to the violence and ethnic tensions and raised questions such as "What did you feel?" "Try to get in touch with your feelings." The other person would listen very carefully ("be a good listener") without making comments or judgments. Then the roles were reversed. Therapeutic group counseling sessions during SCC meetings. SCC mediation teams comprised of members from different ethnic groups visiting the small communities in their neighborhood. Various reconciliation and healing services and rites on the SCCs, outstation and parish levels. Long-range action steps included subsequent Lenten Campaigns devoted to SCCs' involvement in peaceful, free and fair elections.⁴²²

Women and Youth groups, Group Ranches and Income-producing projects, Lay Leadership in Faith Communities, Catechetics and Religious Education.

Davies points out the importance of the Psycho-Social Method (PMS) as a really effective way of developing a parish materially and spiritually by motivating people to be united in spirit, owning a project ("It's our project") and states:

The PMS could be said to have become important with the arrival in Kenya of two Grail members, Ann Hope and Sally Timmel, to act as facilitators in Development Education using the Psycho-Social Method of Paul Frere. The great value of the method was/is that it is genuinely involves "groups of people" into becoming "communities" which are united in implementing projects. (Davies, *From Pilot to Pastoral Bishop*, p. 118)

Bernard Ugeux and Pierre Lefebvre emphasize: "It should however be stressed that this work of consciousness-raising and of the struggle for justice can only be undertaken by Small Christian Communities and their leaders when they have reached a certain degree of maturity. There are laws of psychological growth and stages which cannot be skipped. The active participation of so many of these communities in the movement for democracy shows, however, that they are perfectly capable of taking part in the non-violent struggle for justice." Bernard Ugeux and Pierre Lefebvre, *Small Christian Communities and Parishes*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995, p. 29.

⁴²¹ In my SCC Course on "Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today" at Hekima University College 19 out of the 24 students wrote their Final Term Papers in April, 2008 on tribalism and negative ethnicity in SCCs especially in Nairobi and their ramifications such as Cultural Associations, Discrimination, Favoritism, Cronyism, Human Rights, Gender Issues, Land Reform, Nepotism, Clannism, etc.

⁴²² This and similar examples was the subject of a Faculty Research Seminar at Hekima University College on 15 February, 2012 on the topic "The Pastoral Spiral ("See," "Judge" and "Act") as a New Paradigm for Promoting Justice and Peace in Africa Today." The focus

The *National Mirror*, the monthly Catholic newspaper in Kenya, has started a series “Voices from the Grassroots” that encourages SCC members and other Catholics to express their views before the 2013 National Elections in Kenya. The first article entitled “St. Kizito SCCs: An Example of What SCCs Can Do” describes how a small community in Waruku, Nairobi is involved in a civic education program of the 2012 Kenya Lenten Campaign that is outlined in Section 5. SCC members pledged to promote peaceful elections and non-violence in 2012 and 2013. They emphasized the importance of registering to vote and then using their tools of voting -- their ID and Voter’s Card -- to vote on election’s day on 4 March, 2013. Studying the new *Constitution* together will make the SCC members better citizens. By so doing, “surely the SCCs are fast becoming a voice of the church at the grassroots level,” remarked a member of St. Kizito SCC during their meeting for the First Sunday of Lent.⁴²³

The second article entitled “SCCs of Dandora Parish Worth to Be Emulated by Others” (“A Bold Step towards Forming Youth SCCs”) describes the six Youth SCCs in Dandora Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese – part of the total number of 59 SCCs in the parish. These SCCs are comprised of young people ranging from 14 to 29 years: working youth, unemployed youth, high school students and college students. In discussing the 2013 National Elections they emphasized the importance of educating each other on the main issues, being guided by their Catholic faith, not being used by politicians and using first names only so they do not focus on their ethnic group/tribal affiliation.⁴²⁴

SCCs in Eastern Africa are increasingly an inculturated model of church. This responds to Pope Francis’ call in *The Joy of the Gospel* under the section “A People of Many Faces” (Numbers 115-118):”

The People of God is incarnate in the peoples of the earth, each of which has its own culture. The concept of culture is valuable for grasping the various expressions of the Christian life present in God’s people... Through inculturation, the church introduces peoples, together with their cultures, into her own community, for every culture offers positive values and forms which can enrich the way the Gospel is preached, understood and lived... We would not do justice to the logic of the incarnation if we thought of Christianity as monocultural and monotonous... We cannot demand that peoples of every continent, in expressing their Christian faith, imitate modes of expression which European nations developed at a particular moment of their history, because the faith cannot be constricted to the limits of understanding and expression of any one culture. It is an indisputable fact that no single culture can exhaust the mystery of our redemption in Christ.

is on a paradigm shift that is occurring in Africa not because of the newness of the process or methodology but because of the new results -- the new pastoral and social actions taken. “Spiral” is preferred to “Circle” because it is more open-ended and ongoing in terms of new planning and action.

⁴²³ Francis Njuguna, “Saint Kizito SCCs: An Example of What SCCs Can Do,” *National Mirror*, 24:3 (April, 2012), p. 16.

⁴²⁴ Francis Njuguna, “SCC of Dandora Parish Worth to Be Emulated by Others” *National Mirror*, 24:4 (May, 2012), p. 20.

Inculturation in Africa is seen in the unique or specific names for SCC in the local African languages⁴²⁵ that take on a life of their own such as (in alphabetical order):

Akagongo/Amahega (the Ankole, Uganda word for SCC);

Bete Tsellote (the Amharic, Djibouti, Eritrea and Ethiopia) word for SCC);

Bungwe (the Nyanja, Zambia word for SCC);

Citente (the Bemba, Zambia word for SCC);

Dhome (the Giriama, Kenya word for SCC);

Dog gang (the Acholi, Uganda word for SCC);

Duol (central hut of the homestead and the place in front of the chief or local leader's house where the people gathered for discussion) or *kidiény* (small part of the whole like a part or piece of an animal, small group of people) or *aluor* (small gathering once a month) or *abila* (small group) or *chokruok* (small gathering) (the Luo, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda words for SCC);

Enyati (the Lugbara, Uganda word for SCC);

Jumuiya or *Mkamilishano* (the Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa words for SCC).

Described at length in other parts of this book.

Imiryango Remezoi Vuguruye (the Rwanda, Rwanda word for SCC (“Community of Deep Foundation”));

Imiryango Remezoya Kiliziya (the Rwanda, Rwanda word for “Community of Church Foundation” or BEC);

Kabondo (the original Ganda, Uganda word for SCCs that literally means “the sack of a jigger” – representing a small community). *Akabondo* is “the SCC.” The plural is *Obubondo*. In writing the history Ugandan diocesan priest Father Ambrose J. Bwangatto says that Ugandan diocesan priest and writer Father Francis Tebbekosa invented the name and that Ugandan diocesan priest Joseph Obunga conceptualized it. This term is used positively to mean the source or fountain/the togetherness of the people for better benefit of all. This word is still used in Kampala Archdiocese, Lugazi Diocese and Kasana-Luweero Diocese for SCC.

Some Catholics disliked the secular meaning of the word so other more spiritual or religious names sprung up in Ganda. For example, Luganda speaking places such as Kiyinda Mityana Diocese uses *Ebibiina by'abasseekimu* that is derived from *John 17:21* and *Acts 2* and *4*. The name literally means “people bonded together by love” and signified the small communities united by faith and love.

Kabras or *Shikwenyi* (the Luhya, Kenya words for SCC similar to “small unit”);

Kamwaki (the Meru, Kenya word for SCC)

Katabi (one of the Ganda, Uganda words for SCCs meaning “end branch that bears fruit”). It is popular in Masaka Diocese.

Kibagenge (the Kipsigis, Kenya word for SCC meaning “coming together”)

Kokwet (the Kalenjin, Kenya word for SCC meaning “village neighborhood”);

Limana (the Chewa, Malawi and the Ngoni, Malawi and Tanzania word for SCC);

Mbongi (the Lari, a dialect of Kongo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Republic of the Congo word for SCC meaning a “community meeting of the extended family”);

Mphakati (the Chewa, Malawi and the Nyanja, Zambia word for SCC);

Mugongo (the Runyoro, Uganda word for SCC),

⁴²⁵ These African languages are listed by their root word without the prefixes like “the language of.”

Mwaki (the Gikuyu,⁴²⁶ Kenya word for SCC). Described at length in other parts of this book.

Mwangi (the Embu,⁴²⁷ Kenya word for SCC). Means “fire.”

Omugongo (one of the Ganda, Uganda words for SCCs literally meaning “one hill”). It is the smallest cell of Ugandan traditional society, but the number of people can be too large for a single SCC.

Ondjango (the Umbundu, Angola word for SCC): Comes from a combination of two words that mean exactly “house of dialogue” and that refers to a typical circular structure in the local geographical area that is an excellent place for meeting and sharing;

Nguthu (the Kamba, Kenya word for SCC);

Umubano (the Rundi, Burundi word for SCC);

Umuryango-remezo/Imiryango-remezo (the Rwanda, Rwanda word for BCC).

Literally a basic family, in other words the family of believers and the spirituality of the family are emphasized and enriched.

Uzengezgani (the Tumbuka, Malawi word for SCC)

and so on in other African countries.⁴²⁸ Whatever the country or language, we try to think and be “community” and think and be “a member of a Small Christian Community.”

To expand two examples: *Jumuiya* literally means “community” in Swahili. Kenyan diocesan priest and SCC animator Father Harrison Yaa states:

The word *Jumuiya* has a deeper meaning. It may express brotherhood or sisterhood, communion, unity, integration and harmony. Members of a *Jumuiya* are referred to as *wanajumuiya* that literally means “sons and daughters of the *jumuiya*.” *Jumuiya* in an African context is always personified and signifies a parental figure who takes care of the little ones without any segregation. A parent ordinarily shares what he or she has with the children. In Eastern Africa *wanajumuiya* gather in order to share with each other from what the parent has for them. This particular aspect of sharing constitutes one of the essential elements within the community of believers.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁶ The original and authentic name is Gikuyu.

⁴²⁷ The original and authentic name is Gikuyu.

⁴²⁸ For further research on African names for SCCs see Joseph G. Healey, “Twelve Case Studies of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa” in Agatha Radoli, ed., *How Local is the Local Church? Small Christian Communities and Church in Eastern Africa*, Eldoret: *Spearhead* Nos. 126-28, 1993, pp. 96-99.

⁴²⁹ Harrison Yaa, *Building, Strengthening and Sustaining Small Christian Communities in an Urban Set-up in Nairobi, Kenya: A Case Study in Holy Trinity Catholic Parish in Kariobangi North*, Unpublished Master’s Thesis, Tangaza University College (CUEA), 2011, p. 5.

Mwaki literally means “fire” in Gikuyu.⁴³⁰ Fire is a symbol of unity, life and communication. In traditional Kikuyu society the small community gathered around the fire/fireplace/hearth. It was the place to teach African values, discuss and approve important community issues and perform local ceremonies. A neighborhood community was also called *mwaki* from the way that people made a fire and shared that fire. When the fire had been lit in one home, all the other homes in the neighborhood took their fire from that one place. This sharing of fire helped the people to identify themselves as one community. *Mwaki* or “fire” was symbolic of sharing and communion.

This word *mwaki* now has a specific Christian meaning and ecclesial identity for the local, neighborhood SCC. It is really a “spirituality” with a spirit of solidarity and a sharing of Christian values in the small community. Now when the local Christians say “Let’s go to the *mwaki*” in Gikuyu, everyone knows they are going to the weekly SCC meeting. They have a specific ecclesial identity and life as members of the *mwaki*.⁴³¹

Ugandan seminarian Charles Okure, OCD deepens the meaning of this symbolism by explaining that as Catholics “gather together as the church, they gather around the fire that is Christ. Catholics come and communicate with Christ, who in turn transforms them into his own church that they can easily know, experience and love, and therefore help to perpetuate.”⁴³²

Recent research indicates that of the 45,000 SCCs in Kenya as many as 8,000 could be *miaki* (plural of *mwaki*). The origin of the name is traced to Ngarariga Parish in Limuru Deanery in Nairobi Archdiocese. In the period 1975-76 the parish priest, Kenyan diocesan priest Father Cletus Ngugi, visited the homes of parishioners. He found the Gikuyu-speaking Catholics rather distant from each other and the Sunday Masses filled with large anonymous crowds of parishioners. So to bring closer personal relationships and better family spirit he suggested that the Catholics meet in their homes to reflect on the Scriptures together. So *mwaki* was born. This was a significant turning point in the pastoral life of the Catholic Church in Kenya and symbolic of SCCs as a key pastoral priority in the AMECEA Region.

The Kikuyu people composed a specific song in Gikuyu about *mwaki* called *God, Keep the Fire Burning* that is found in the *Gikuyu Hymnal*. It is their SCC theme song to encourage *mwaki* members. Some of the verses are: “When you miss the weekly meeting you put the fire out.” “Let the fire burn and don’t cover it.”

In traditional African village life one home fire at a central place spreads fire and light to all the other fires. A Sukuma, Tanzania proverb says *A good supply of wood keeps the fire burning through the night* which is similar to the universal proverbs *You never let the home fire go out* and *always keep the home fire burning*. This is connected to the African value of

⁴³⁰ The Focolare is an international apostolic group or association in Eastern Africa. An interesting connection is that the Italian word *foca* means “fire” and *lare* is “hearth.” So *Focolare* refers to the fireplace area similar to the extended meaning of *mwaki*.

⁴³¹ Based on a conversation of Kenyan Bishop James Maria Wainaina of Murang’a Diocese, Kenya with the author in Nairobi, Kenya in June, 2011.

⁴³² Charles Okure, “The Common Activities in Small Christian Communities in Africa Today,” Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2016.

life. There is a Malawi saying: *As long as there is a fire burning in the village so long God will give us life.*⁴³³ Mwoleka used this symbolism to explain the growth of SCCs. A small group of people is better than one person. Then the fire of the Holy Spirit works in the whole group. It is important that the core community remains alive and zealous so it can light others. If a parish or outstation has one or two SCCs that are dynamic, these can stimulate the growth and expansion of other SCCs.

This symbolism can apply to SCC members' experience of Advent. In lighting the four Advent candles on the Advent Wreath, you can individually light the first candle, then the second, then the third and finally the fourth candle (from a match or lighter). Or you can use the first lighted candle to light the second, the second lighted candle to light the third and so on. Lighting the second candle does not take away the light, heat, intensity and power of the first candle. This the spirit and practice of mission and of passing on the good news of Jesus Christ. There is a saying, *let us always burn with the fire of mission* **REVISE**

Another dimension of inculturation is the new lay ministries that have emerged in the SCCs in Eastern Africa. In fact, SCCs are a continuing source of new ministries. This is seen in the true story "What New Ministry Would You Start?"

In one part of Tanzania Small Christian Community (SCC) members were asked: "In addition to the existing ministries in our SCCs, what new ministry or ministries would you start?" They answered immediately: "The ministry of healing especially the laying on of hands." In African society healing (physical, psychological, and spiritual) is very important especially in light of the on-going influence of superstition and witchcraft. Healing rituals are an essential part of various African Independent Churches and Pentecostal Churches: prayers for healing, healing ceremonies and rituals and the regular laying on of hands.

Yet the Catholic Church has hesitated to make this a part of its regular (even daily) ministry and liturgy. One elderly expatriate missionary priest was asked what he would do differently if he was starting his missionary ministry over again. Immediately he answered: "Emphasize healing liturgies more."⁴³⁴

Praying over sick people and laying on of hands is now a common part of many SCCs. SCC members visit the sick people in their neighborhood immediately after the weekly *Bible Service* or on a designated day of the week.

But we need to emphasize the healing ministry even more. This is one of the great attractions of the Pentecostal and Evangelical Churches that often use names such as the Deliverance Church and the Healing Church. St. Charles Lwanga Small Christian Community in the Drive-in Estate of St. Peter's Parish is one of the best SCCs in Dar es

⁴³³ See Joseph Healey, *A Fifth Gospel: The Experience of Back Christian Values*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books and London: SCM Press, 1981, p. 115.

⁴³⁴ "What New Ministry Would You Start?" Story No. 550 in the "African Stories Database", African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 21 July 2011, [http://afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=504](http://afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid[0]=504)

Salaam, Tanzania. Members faithfully participate in the parish and SCCs activities. Yet one day several members asked: “Is it all right for us to go to the healing services at the main Pentecostal Church down the road?” There is a clear message and challenge here. An increasing number of Catholics are comfortable with a both/and approach.

Another new lay ministry in SCCs is described by American Maryknoll Missionary and Kenyatta University Catholic chaplain Lance Nadeau, MM:

In addition to being agents of missionary outreach to the poor, SCCs in Nairobi and elsewhere in East Africa are developing a *new, inculturated and critical* form of lay healthcare ministry: the *huduma ya afya* (Swahili for “the service of healthcare”), a volunteer community-based healthcare apostolate. In response to the health needs of the wider community, the *jumuiya ndogo ndogo* collectively select those among their members who have the special abilities needed for the *huduma ya afya* that is also called “*Healthcare Ministry*” or “*Health Service Giving*” or “*Health Services*.” These gifted men and women are then commissioned to be *wahudumu wa afya* (“ministers” or “service givers”) who carry out the SCCs’ healthcare ministry. These volunteer healthcare workers [also called field health workers] provide the following services:

1. Visit the sick in their homes to talk and pray with them.
2. Bring nurses and social workers to evaluate the sick.
3. Recommend that the sick go to dispensaries and hospitals.
4. Accompany the sick to dispensaries and hospitals if necessary.
5. Bring medications to the sick.
6. Train the family members in home care, nutrition and hygiene.
7. Inform the parish priests if the sick want a visit.⁴³⁵

⁴³⁵ Lance Nadeau, “The Small Christian Communities’ Healthcare Ministry: A Model for Future Mission” in *African Continent Report for the 1999 International Consultation on Small Christian Communities*, Nairobi: Printed Paper, 1999, pp. 33-34. These healthcare ministers carry out their apostolate with the support of the Archdiocese of Nairobi’s Eastern Deanery Community-Based Healthcare and AIDS Relief Program (EDARP).

Nairobi’s SCCs do not stand alone in developing a new form of healthcare ministry. Other communities are making similar contributions to the formation of the East African Church. Mombasa Archdiocese has the Mombasa Catholic Community-Based Health Care (CBHC) Services. Kisumu Archdiocese has the Pandipieri Catholic Center Program of Home Based [Health] Care Workers (HBCWs) – volunteers from the SCCs who work alongside paid nurses and social workers in the outreach to HIV and AIDS patients.

On the healthcare ministry of SCCs in Kampala, Uganda, see Joseph G. Healey, “Inculturation in Africa,” *New People*, May-June, 1992, pp. 13-18; Healey, “Twelve Case Studies,” pp. 70-71; Glen Williams, and Nassali Tamale, *The Caring Community: Coping with AIDS in Urban Uganda*, Strategies for Hope 6, London: ActionAid; Nairobi: African Medical and Research Foundation [AMREF], 1991.

These volunteer Community Healthcare Workers (CHCs) or ministers focus on reaching out to people with HIV/AIDS and their families. The 20th Anniversary xxx The Booklet of Eastern Deanery Community-Based Healthcare and AIDS Relief Program (EDARP) of Nairobi Archdiocese states.

Our pools of dedicated CHWs are members of the Small Christian Communities (SCCs). These are nominated by the parish though occasionally individual members may nominate themselves. They too must be vetted by the parish. Once potential CHWs are identified, they must undergo training within their respective parishes using the National CHWs Curriculum. The training curriculum comprises forty hours spread out as two hour weekly modules. On successful completion of training they are commissioned by the parish at the main mass on Sunday to care for the sick. CHWs walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ making Him more present to the sick person, to the community and are prophetic against the culture of death in this multi-faceted response.⁴³⁶

As of 30 September, 2014 a total of 2,680 CHWs have been trained in the past 21 years. 1,051 are presently active.

English writer Gillian Paterson stresses the importance of home-based care in the context of SCCs:

The Catholic Church joined the struggle against AIDS back in the early 1980s, when the epidemic first emerged from the shadows. Church mission hospitals and clinics, which already provided a substantial proportion of health care in sub-Saharan Africa, were at the forefront. When the hospitals proved incapable of meeting the needs of the growing numbers of sick, the churches, especially the Catholics and the Salvation Army, found that their existing methods of home-based care could be adapted to the new demands, providing realistic treatment and prevention in situations of poverty – a model widely followed by other organizations.

But by the mid-1990s, the number of sick and dying people had increased drastically. Now the churches are activating their worshipping communities to tackle the local needs of sufferers and their families, their carers, and the orphans. Here again, existing Catholic networks of Small Christian Communities within parishes have provided a framework. Johannes, dying of AIDS in a Tanzanian slum, told me: "The best thing in my life, I waited for until I was almost dead. It has been the Small Christian Community in this place, and the way we sing and pray together. I feel I am not alone."⁴³⁷

Zambian Jesuit Father Leonard Chiti, SJ writes extensively about the

⁴³⁶ *History of Innovative Community Healthcare & TB/HIV Prevention, Care & Treatment*, Unpublished Booklet, Nairobi: Eastern Deanery AIDS Relief Program (EDARP), 2013. p. 14.

⁴³⁷ Gillian Paterson, "Fighting AIDS in Africa," *Tablet*, 9 June, 2001. *Tablet* Website, retrieved on 4 November, 2016, <http://archive.thetablet.co.uk/article/9th-june-2001/9/fighting-aids-in-africa>

home-based care (HBC) program or system for treating people living with HIV in Zambia as a complement to the mainstream healthcare delivery system for people living with HIV (PLWH):

Initially the home-based care (HBC) system emerged as a community/grassroots based initiative to deal with a very serious matter of the inadequate capacity of the state health delivery system to cope with the challenge of increasing numbers of patients testing positive for HIV...The Catholic Church's intervention through the establishment of home-based care (HBC) has had enormous success in the treatment and curative approach to the pandemic in addition to its pastoral interventions....In Zambia in the Catholic Church that accounts for a third of all people calling themselves Christian, the home-based care (HBC) system followed closely the pattern of Small Christian Communities.⁴³⁸

African values are seen in importance of mourning, bereavement and funerals in the ministries and activities of SCCs in Eastern Africa. SCCs in Zambia have established Funeral Committees almost always headed by women. Zambian Oblates of Mary Immaculate priest Kelvin Lubinda Yeta, OMI writes:

The Funeral Committee in Zambia is one of the activities that is female driven. This [SCC] committee is headed by a female member. When there is a funeral in the community, it is this committee that liaises with the family. It mobilizes members to cook and clean at the funeral throughout the mourning period till burial. The committee also ensures that there are members to sing, pray and offer words of encouragement to the bereaved family. The women normally take turns to spend nights at the funeral house. The committee also acts as the link between the parish priest and the bereaved family. When the day of burial is agreed, it is the committee that relays this to the parish priest and ensures that the burial program is in place. It gives the community contribution to the family. The contribution can be in kind or cash depending on whether a community member is just hosting a funeral or it is actually a community member that has passed away. In addition, the committee makes certain that transport is available for community members who will attend the burial. Finally, the committee advises the family on the dos and don'ts of the church.⁴³⁹

African forms of inculturation can be effectively used in the formation and empowerment⁴⁴⁰ of the laity and SCCs members. Healey and Sybertz write:

⁴³⁸ Leonard Chiti, "Fighting AIDS from the Grassroots: History, Theology, Values and Challenges of Home-Based Care in Zambia" Jacquineau Azetsop, (ed.), *HIV & AIDS in Africa: Christian Reflection, Public Health, Social Transformation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016, 378-380.

⁴³⁹ Kelvin Lubinda Yeta, *The Involvement/Participation of Women in Small Christian Communities -- St. Leopold Parish, Shangombo, Diocese of Livingstone, Zambia*, Nairobi: Tangaza University College Unpublished Long Essay, 2013, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁴⁰ Empowerment is used in many different contexts. Most are good especially in the spiritual and religious sense. But one must get away from the wrong idea of the unequal, one-sided

"Empowerment by the Spirit" is more than just a nice sounding expression. It is a daily reality on the local level. A concrete example of inculturation is the various empowerment, commissioning and sending forth ceremonies: the installation of the new parish council leaders or a new catechist; the commissioning of new religion teachers; and the sending forth of SCC members to start new small communities. The people deeply feel the presence and activity of the "Unsurpassed Great Spirit."⁴⁴¹

Another interesting example of inculturation is how African art and illustrations promote the importance of SCCs. Africans easily respond to visual communications. The cover of *Spearhead* Booklet No. 45, *Ujamaa and Christian Communities* edited by Christopher Mwoleka and Joseph Healey, is a creative design by American artist Mary Lou Rose. The top half shows 10 different Africans walking as individuals. The bottom half shows them walking two by two and helping each other: a farmer carries a small child on his shoulder; a young boy leads a blind man, a young woman carries the heavy load of a mother carrying a baby on her back; two youth carry a basket together; and a young man walks arm in arm with an old man who walks with a cane.

The Lumko teaching series of SCC posters especially the *Training for Community Ministries* series depict various ways that SCCs are a new model of church. The communion (or community) of communities model is clearly seen in the drawing of a parish being a communion of outstations and the outstations being a communion of SCCs (depicted as 10-12 people sitting around in a circle with the *Bible* in the middle). The teaching on "developing shared ministries" is conveyed through a drawing of the Body Christ based on *Ephesians* 4:1-16 and *1 Corinthians* 2:1-11. Some of the serving tasks of community ministries depicted inside the drawing of Christ are SCC members visiting and laying hands on the sick, teaching small groups of adults and children, singing and praising God together and laying bricks in building together.

One Lumko poster depicts a cartoon of the *Kokoteni* (the Swahili word for a large hand-drawn cart) Model of Church. Lay people are sitting in a cart that is being pulled by two bishops and being pushed by two nuns. This portrays the traditional "Provided for Church." This leads to a discussion on giving more responsibility to lay people in a communitarian rather than a hierarchical church. The teaching mantra is: *Build the people so we can build the church.*

A special feature of these Lumko courses is to help participants learn how to write local training programs to suit their own situations and needs back home. This is a key part of the process of "Training of Trainers" (TOT) Workshops.

Tanzanian layman Charles Ndege is one of the leading religious artists in East Africa. The Cathedral Parish of Musoma Diocese, Tanzania is called Mary, Mother of God. On one large wall Ndege created an inculturated oil painting called *Our Lady of Fatima in Africa*, the famous miracle story in an African context. In the center of the large mural is an African Blessed Virgin Mary teaching the three African children the rosary. She is standing amidst

sense: the rich empowering the poor, the "haves" empowering the "have not's," the West empowering the Global South.

⁴⁴¹ Healey and Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, pp. 301-302.

the large boulders and rocks so characteristic of the shore of Lake Victoria where Musoma is located in northwestern Tanzania. In each corner of the painting is a SCC gathering: SCC members sitting in a circle reading the *Bible* and praying the rosary.

On the other large wall of the cathedral Ndege created an inculturated oil painting called *Jesus Sends Out Seventy-two Tanzanian Disciples*, the story of *Luke* 10:1 in an African context. He uses the faces of real people in Musoma Diocese-- the local African bishop, priests, sisters, catechists and lay people – to emphasize that we are all missionaries. These “Tanzanian disciples” are sent two by two in the spirit of small communities.

A similar oil painting⁴⁴² called *Jesus Teaches Along the Lake Shore*⁴⁴³ is on the back wall of the chapel of the Makoko Language School, Makoko, Musoma, Tanzania. The setting is near Lake Victoria in the small village of Makoko, three miles from Musoma. The time is 9 a.m. with a bright tropical sun glowing on the horizon. In the background are local sailboats on the lake, small islands and rock formations that are characteristic of the local area. The huts and houses near the shore follow the design of the local ethnic groups, the Kwaya, Kuria, and Ngoreme and one modern tin-roof house. Jesus stands in the middle dressed in the royal color of red.⁴⁴⁴ He is sending out modern Tanzanian disciples two by

⁴⁴² This color version is on the cover of one of the printings of the book *Towards an African Narrative Theology*. A black and white version and explanation is on p. 344.

⁴⁴³ This and other paintings by Charles Ndege can be found on the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers Africa Region Website, retrieved 24 July, 2014, <http://www.maryknollafrika.org/HealeyAlbum2.htm> and the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 2 July, 2022, [African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories – African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories \(tangaza.ac.ke\)](http://www.tangaza.ac.ke/AfricanProverbs,SayingsandStories)

⁴⁴⁴ Ndege always portrays Jesus Christ as an African. He recognizes the importance of the Jesus Christ of history (“historical Jesus”), but he wants to paint the Jesus Christ of his African faith (“Jesus of faith”). Similar to a Kenyan artist’s comments, Ndege movingly describes his feelings while painting Jesus as an African. He said that he experiences Jesus in a deeper and more meaningful way through African culture and symbols. He wanted to share his experience of the African Christ through art. In his African paintings Ndege wants to portray how Jesus Christ becomes one of us in an African context. He says: “I have many dreams about our African Jesus who is the one God.” Charles Ndege, email to the author, 3 March, 2016.

A section on “The Jesus Christ of History and the Jesus Christ of Faith” in *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Orbis Books) states:

The challenge in evolving an authentic African Christianity is graphically symbolized in the controversy over the "African Christ" or the "Black Christ." During our many years in Africa we have been involved in the on-going debate over how to portray Jesus Christ in pictures, in art, and in drama. We have participated in endless workshops, discussions, even arguments, about the Christ of History *vis-a-vis* the Christ of Faith. For many Africans it is still important to portray Jesus as a Jew who lived in Israel 2,000 years ago including all the historical and cultural details. Others want to portray Christ as an African living here and now. Both ways have their meaning and relevance. The goal is "both...and," rather than "either...or."

two -- men and women, adults, youth and children. There is a mixture of elderly couples, women carrying babies on their backs and young boys and girls wearing a combination of traditional and modern African clothes. Some are still listening to Jesus's commission to "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (*Mark 16:15*). Others have begun walking away on their missionary journeys. Some of these disciples have already gotten into the small boats two by two. Two others are riding a bicycle. Their faces radiate the joy and enthusiasm of being messengers of the good news. Traveling two by two represents the strength and energy of the small communities.

There is a famous Burkina Faso proverb: *If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together.* It is also an Agaw (Eritrea and Ethiopia) Proverb. It can be interpreted on different levels. Robert Moriarty states:

This slice of African proverbial wisdom captures an insight that is all the more meaningful when we reflect on it with the eyes of faith.

Journey is one of those fundamental themes that we have employed to speak of life across the centuries. It is a literary commonplace. It has been part and parcel of the story of deliverance of our forefathers/mothers who made their way from Egypt to the Promised Land. They travelled together.

Journey marks the gospel writers' description of the ministry of Jesus. But neither did he walk alone. Jesus drew to himself disciples who walked with him on his way. They followed him who tells us in John's gospel, "I am the way, the truth and the life." (*John 14:6*). The earliest description of Jesus' followers, even before they became known as "Christians," is that they were

Towards an African Narrative Theology, p. 91.

The Ghanaian artist Cephas Agbememu discusses the meaning of the Ewe (Ghana, Benin, Nigeria and Togo) proverb:

Akpa le tome gake menya tsi fe vevie nyenyee. (Ewe)

A fish is in water but does not know the importance of water. (English literal translation)

A fish is the last to acknowledge the existence of water. (English figurative translation)

The meaning is that a fish is always in the water, but until it comes out of the water it doesn't even recognize that the water exists. This proverb explains why African Christians, in particular some church leaders, are slow in Africanization and inculturation such as emphasizing the importance of African art such as the African Christ. Africans can be the last to recognize the value of their local "Africanness" and the importance of their African cultures and environment. This Ewe proverb challenges them to inculturate more.

October, 2009 "African Proverb of the Month," African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 5 March, 2016,

<http://afriprov.org/african-proverb-of-the-month/42-2009proverbmonth/495-proverbmonthoct09.html>

followers of “the way.” We find this description repeatedly in the *Acts of the Apostles* (9:1; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22)

And today when we speak of the church gathering in synod, we are using a word whose Greek origins (*syn-hodos*) carries the meaning of together -- on the way. We gather in big church and small church to be nourished by word and sacrament on the way. We know in our bones and in our spirits that we do not walk alone. The love of God accompanies us.

The new universe story captures the eons as a journey, even as scripture itself has long ago declared to us that all creation is on the way to the reign of God. Pope Francis puts this thought beautifully when he says:

Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth. (*Laudato Si*, No. 92).

If not by sight, we walk by faith – together.⁴⁴⁵

South African theologian Nontando Hadebe states:

I have used this African proverb to bring together my reflections on the readings of this Fourth Sunday of Advent, Year A. Proverbs are the prime ethical teaching tools for oral cultures because they are easy to remember and contain multiple meanings making these rich sources for reflection. This particular proverb is no different and can be interpreted in many ways but for the purposes of this reflection, I will be using the interpretation of partnership or working with others to build and sustain a long term goal rather than working alone. Working alone is easier and tasks are done much faster because one does not need to engage, negotiate and seek consensus or cooperation with others. Yet this proverb makes the claim that work that is long term and sustaining requires the participation of others in a shared vision.

So does this rule apply to God? Does God operate alone without engaging humanity in the work of salvation?

In the reading from Isaiah God is in conversation with king Ahaz and makes a promise for the future coming of Emmanuel – God with us. In the readings of the gospel the coming and mission of Emmanuel is revealed in conversation with Joseph and prior to that in conversation with Mary. Jesus is Emmanuel. It would have been easier for God to make Jesus appear as an adult and carry out his ministry. But God chooses to ‘go far’ to take the long route of working with others of being vulnerable, entering into conversation, involving strangers in God’s plan. The coming of Emmanuel caused a rift in the relationship between Mary and Joseph. God steps in through a dream to

⁴⁴⁵ Robert Moriarty, “Preface,” *Quest* (A Reflection Booklet for Small Christian Communities), Bloomfield, CT: 2017, p. iii.

enter a conversation with Joseph that explains the pregnancy of Mary and the destiny of Emmanuel as Jesus, the one who will save humanity from their sins. Emmanuel came as a baby not an adult and had to grow in a family which required the support and love of Mary and Joseph, family and community. Yeshua had to grow until he was an adult before he could proclaim the gospel of salvation. All this took time. A promise made centuries ago is fulfilled through participation of others and their sacrifice and willingness to be part of the plan of salvation.

In the letter to the Romans we read that the gospel of salvation had reached communities beyond the villages in Israel and was spreading throughout the world. The messengers were women and men who had experienced salvation through Jesus. The fruit of salvation is given in the psalms as pure hearts from whom ethical behavior flows to others. God could have easily done everything faster as God working alone without humanity – Jesus could have appeared as an adult, teaching healing, dying and rising again. In three years he could have done his mission and returned to God, but God chose the ways of involving a village of people to work together to bring about the salvation destined for all of humanity.

What does this say to us today as we seek to be bring Emmanuel into our lives and into the world that we live in. Salvation was born from a participatory process of working with others for the common good in changing the world. Similarly our mission in the world requires conversations, inclusion of all people who are involved in the issues that we seek to respond to. In a world where exclusion of the other and fear of the other is increasingly becoming the norm, we who follow Emmanuel are called to walk, live and talk in a different way of conversation, working with inclusion in the struggle for a world where our hearts don't create separation but bring us together as a human family called together to respond to God's salvation.⁴⁴⁶

Each week of the annual Kenya Lenten Campaign uses a striking drawing in the reflection booklet. All SCC members quickly get involved in studying and discussing the meaning and teaching of the drawing. Week Three of Lent, 2009 focused on "Environmental Care (Ecology)" within the overall theme of "Justice, Peace and Reconciliation." The drawing depicted eight examples of harming or destroying the environment in the top half and seven examples of helping or caring for the environment in the bottom half. A SCC member in St. Kizito SCC in St. Austin's Parish in Nairobi, Kenya spotted that the farmers were barefoot (bad) in the top half of the drawing while the farmers were wearing shoes and boots (good) in the bottom half of the drawing. No one else in the various SCCs that I visited had noticed this.

The Jesus Mafa paintings from the Mafa Ethnic Group in North Cameroon are an excellent example of inculturation in Africa.⁴⁴⁷ They help SCCs members to understand and live the Gospel in an African context. Mafa Christian communities wanted to have an African

⁴⁴⁶ Nontando Hadebe, Catholic Women Preach Website, retrieved 21 December, 2016, <http://catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/12182016>

⁴⁴⁷ See the Life of Jesus Mafa Website at <http://www.jesusmafa.com/?lang=en>.

representation of the gospel. The most important New Testament scenes for liturgical and catechetical use were selected, adapted and acted out in tableaux by the village people. These simple tableaux were photographed. After a careful and detailed study they were painted by the artist Bénédite/Bénédicte de la Roncière. 63 scenes from the Annunciation to Pentecost illustrate the three years of Sunday gospels in the lectionary cycle. “The Mission to the World (the Great Commission), “Jesus Sends the Seventy-two Disciples” and “The Disciples at Emmaus” can be especially applied to SCCs ministry.

Another example of inculturation is the Prayer of the Faithful (General Intercessions or Universal Prayer)⁴⁴⁸ that are an important part of the weekly *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection*, masses, liturgical ceremonies and SCC gatherings of any type. Ugandan historian and theologian John Waliggo emphasized that the authentic African spirituality of the local people is reflected in these prayers. Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki of Nairobi Archdiocese encouraged people to pray in their heart languages that is usually their mother tongue or first language.

Prayers for the sick and for deceased people (our ancestors in Christ or the living dead) have always been important, frequent and reflect deep African cultural and Christian values. On feasts such as All Souls Day on 2 November we remember and celebrate the lives of those who have gone before us, “that great cloud of witnesses who surround us” or “surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses” (*Hebrews 12:1*) and support us with their prayers and inspiration. Also in the first week of November and on the annual Patron/Patroness Saint feast days of our SCCs, the members remember and pray for (and with) especially those people who have died in our small communities in the past year.

Prayers are an important part of African oral literature. An example is an "African Prayer of Blessing":

Facing east: "For our ancestors of the distant past."

Facing west: "For our recent living dead."

Facing north: "For our living."

Facing south: "For our yet unborn."

This incorporates many African values of community, family/extended family, personal relationships and solidarity. This has been inculturated in the Catholic Mass during the "Prayer of the Faithful" ("General Intercessions").

One important “Prayer of the Faithful” is: “For all our private intentions...let us pray to the Lord.” Here we can gather all our many private, personal intentions.

Participating in various SCCs I hear other intentions that reflect the “signs of the times” in Kenya.⁴⁴⁹ SCC members always pray in blessing and thanksgiving before a cup of

⁴⁴⁸ Also called the “Universal Prayer” and the “Bidding Prayers.”

⁴⁴⁹ In a talk on the liturgy in the United States American spiritual writer and speaker Father Ronald Rolheiser, OMI said that we often get the order of the “Prayer of the Faithful” (General Intercessions) in Mass wrong. We should begin with the local, specific intentions of our family, SCCs, neighborhood, workplace, school and gradually move to national and finally international intentions such as the Pope and world peace. These should be inductive prayers, not deductive and hierarchical.

tea or any kind of food and drink in the SCCs gatherings. Prayers for rain and good crops are common everywhere. Mothers especially pray that “our daughters marry the right man” (surely a commentary on the lack of eligible spouses in our increasingly secular⁴⁵⁰ and “a-

⁴⁵⁰ This word has many meanings and is often misused. Traditionally in the Catholic Church secular priests do not take vows while religious (belonging to religious institutes) take vows. This is similar to a wide variety of Third Orders that use the name “Secular.”

Many people use “secular” to describe the present day reality in the world that is not religious or spiritual. This is connected to consumerism, materialism, relativism and a more scientific interpretation of the world. One dictionary definition is: “denoting attitudes, activities, or other things that have no religious or spiritual basis.” Example: “secular music;” “secular universities;” “secular buildings.” Synonyms: nonreligious, areligious, lay, temporal, worldly, earthly, profane.

I feel that there is a false distinction between sacred and secular and a similar dichotomy in pairs like “sacred” and “profane.” For me basically “secular” is a neutral word, yet it is often wrongly used to describe parts of our everyday life that are not religious or holy, and even against them, and even bad, for example, “the secular world” and “secular society.” Some writers express their reservations by using the word in inverted commas – “secular” or use the expression “the so-called secular world or life.” The same can be said for the word “world” that has connotations of being not religious or holy, even bad as in “worldly” or “worldliness.” It is helpful to put adjectives in front of these words like “spiritual worldliness.”

Daniel O’Leary writes: “We need to be reminded every Christmas morning, every Sunday morning, that there are no longer two parallel lives in our existence – on the one hand the so-called spiritual life, on the other the so-called secular [life]. Every moment of authentic experience is the felt propinquity [nearness, closeness] of divine grace.” “Illuminating Our Darkness,” *Tablet*, Vol. 268, No. 9079 (13 December, 2014), p. 16. *Tablet Website*, retrieved on 21 December, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/4141/illuminating-our-darkness>

The Dutch Protestant theologian Dr. Johannes C. Hoekendijk said that there are not two towers in the world – a sacred tower and a secular tower. Rather there is just one tower in which “the holy is the depth of the common.” This fits into the worldview that God created everything and that all of God’s creation is good.

The French Jesuit scientist and theologian Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ said: “By virtue of Creation, and still more the Incarnation, nothing here below is profane for those who know how to see.”

Georges Bernanos’ *The Diary of a Country Priest* (pp. 297-298) has this poignant passage about a dying man:

The priest was still on his way, and finally I was bound to voice my deep regret that such delay threatened to deprive my comrade of the final consolations of our Church. He did not seem to hear me. But a few moments later he put his hand over mine, and his eyes entreated me to draw closer to him. He then uttered these words almost in my ear. And I am quite sure that I

religious” cities such as Nairobi). “May our children be free from alcoholism and drugs.” “May God remove greed from the lives of our political leaders.” “May corruption be rooted out from our institutions and projects.” “May all our ethnic groups live in peace and harmony.”

In our evaluation we noticed that inculturation has not taken place in some African SCCs. In some places clerical-centeredness, too much supervision from above and over-emphasis on administration has stifled creative inculturation from below. From the perspective of Malawi, Malawian diocesan priest and theologian Father Francis Masuku points out:

Traditional religion, customs and practices seems to be ignored in the program of SCCs. Good structures as they are [and a good environment] for dialog with [African] traditional religion, customs and practices, SCCs do not seem to be utilized for that purpose.⁴⁵¹

When the retired Archbishop of Kumasi, Ghana Peter Sarpong was asked what is the core value of African society,⁴⁵² he immediately answered in the single word "participation." Participation is at the heart of the life and activities of SCCs.⁴⁵³ In recent years another important word has emerged: “Solidarity.” The Apostolic Exhortation on the First African Synod, *The Church in Africa*, states: “African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life.”

have recorded them accurately, for his voice, though halting, was strangely distinct.

“Does it matter? Grace is... everywhere.”

I think he died just then.

Ilio Delio’s comment: “Hence, Thomas Berry concludes, there are not two stories, religious and scientific, there is only one story, the Great Story. In a world of quantum reality, nothing is itself without everything else; there is no separation. The universe is a single, multiform reality.”

⁴⁵¹ Francis Masuku, *Exploring the Nature of the Encounter Between Christian and Traditional African Spiritualities in Malawi: The Search for a Contextual Lomwe Christian Spirituality*, Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellon Press, 2007.

⁴⁵² To the question “What is the core value of SCCs?” SCCs members in Eastern Africa would answer “relationships.”

⁴⁵³ Most of our written and oral sources are adults. That is why it is refreshing to get Peter Hagerty, “Assembly’s Right and Duty to Participate”, Washington, DC: Georgetown University, unpublished paper, 2018. 9 pages. Peter is a 22-year-old college senior. In this article he interviewed a 70-year-old woman (Baby Boomer Generation); a 50-year-old woman (Generation X); and two Georgetown University students – one young woman and one young man (Generation Z).

Worldwide, the unofficial theme song of SCCs is “Bind Us Together, Lord.” It expresses the conscious solidarity and bonding between SCC members. It was sung at the African Inculturated Small Christian Community (Jumuiya) Mass at Hekima University College (Jesuit School of Theology) in Nairobi, Kenya on 23 February, 2011. It was also sung at our Eucharistic Celebration at CUEA led by the Faculty of Theology on the occasion of the 13th Interdisciplinary Theological Session on 4 March, 2011.

In a social context solidarity is a rich and meaningful word that signifies a conscious identification with others and pulling together for a common cause. It expresses the concern and support that SCC members feel towards struggling and suffering people, for example, Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Kenya, the people of South Sudan rebuilding their country after independence and people with terminal illnesses. The mass mentioned above had a concrete example of conscious solidarity through prayer. In saying the *Our Father* the word: "Food" was substituted for "Bread" ("Give us this day our daily food...") to express solidarity with hungry and starving people in Northern Kenya, Somalia, the Horn of Africa and other places in Africa.

In all our courses and workshops on SCCs we begin with a “conscious” solidarity prayer or song⁴⁵⁴ or Scripture reading or church document reading linked to a specific place, people and intention, for example: Peace in South Sudan; Presidential Elections in African countries; Eliminating Human Trafficking; Overcoming Corruption, Poor Governance and Tribalism; Solving Problems of Insecurity; More Catholic Church Marriages; and World Mission Sunday.⁴⁵⁵

Another concrete example is some of the reflections during the Mission Symposium on “The Future of Mission in Africa” that took place at Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya on 1-2 April, 2011. The Panel Presentation and Breakout Small Apostolic Group on “Environment and Mission” quoted St. John Paul II’s challenge: “The ecological crisis reveals the urgent moral need for a new solidarity”⁴⁵⁶ with the problems associated with environmental deterioration. Besides what we can do personally to promote ecology and the environment, several participants emphasized concerted action through our SCCs. What if the 45,000 SCCs in Kenya focused their efforts on environmental change? Kenya

⁴⁵⁴ SCC-related songs that are used in these courses, workshops, the weekly meetings of the SCCs and *Jumuiya* Masses include: “Bind Us Together, Lord” that includes a lyric referring to “You are the Family of God,” a key concept to Africa) “*Iende Mbele Injili*” (“Let the Word of God Go Forth”), “*Jumuiya Zote na Waumini Wote*” (“All Communities and All Believers”). “Make Me a Channel of Your Peace” and “Tazama, Tazama” (“Look, Look”). Other popular Swahili songs are “*Bwana Yesu Kafufuka, Twimbe Alleluya*” (“The Lord Jesus Has Risen, Let’s Sing Alleluya”), “*Karibuni Moyoni Mwangu*” (“Welcome into My Heart”) and “*Tumaini Letu*” (“Our Hope”).

⁴⁵⁵ Mission in the singular is preferred in light of contemporary missiology and mission practice. Missions in the plural has overtones of the outdated geographical or territorial missions as in “the Young Churches in mission lands” and “those poor mission countries in Africa and Asia.”

⁴⁵⁶ John Paul II, *Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace 1 January 1990*: “Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation,” No. 10.

Lenten Campaigns have emphasized “Environmental Care” and ask what part SCCs can play “in promoting human rights and preserving the environment.” SCCs can be mobilized through Kenya for national campaigns.

This is closely related to the importance of the word “solidarity” in the theme of AMECEA’s 50th Jubilee celebrations: “AMECEA Family of God Celebrating a Golden Jubilee of Evangelization in Solidarity.” The “Prayer for AMECEA” says in part: “We the AMECEA Bishops thank God for inspiring the founding Fathers to create this illustrious association of solidarity and pastoral collaboration.” The final *Communiqué of the 17th AMECEA Plenary Assembly and Golden Jubilee Celebrations* uses the word “solidarity” seven times.

Here is the personal witness of Kenyan laywoman Pamela Adinda:

The aspect of “solidarity” in the Small Christian Community is something that I recently experienced firsthand. At St. Paul’s University Chapel in Nairobi, Kenya that is my parish, our Small Christian Communities are the various groups in the parish in which parishioners are obliged to join. There are about 18 groups or SCCs including CWA, Community Choir Group, Friends of St. Paul’s Group, St. Paul Prayer Group, Men of St. Paul Group, Lectors, Altar Society, PMS, St. Paul Youth Group, Self Help Group, Eucharistic Members Group, *Bible* Study Group, Mass Servers, Liturgical Committee Group, CJPC Group, Renewal Group, Family Life Group and Ushers and Helpers Group.

I belong to the Lectors SCC. Three weeks ago my two babies were admitted at Gertrude’s Children Hospital when both had throat infections. We stayed in the hospital for six days and trust me the SOLIDARITY that I got from my Small Christian Community, the Lectors Group of St. Paul, was amazing. Each day SCC members called, texted, and used all sorts of social media to keep in touch with me. We prayed together over the phone and they encouraged me a lot. I felt like I really belonged and that was very important to me. The Lectors SCC members journeyed with me throughout the time my children were admitted and they continued supporting me even after we left the hospital. That’s why SOLIDARITY in the Small Christian Community is very important to me.⁴⁵⁷

There is a big difference between a SCC and a Small Apostolic Group (of which there are many varieties) just as there is a big difference between a SCC Model of Church and a Small Apostolic Group Model of Church. The SCCs are integrally connected to the life, pastoral structures, ministries/services and overall activities of the parish. In many cases the Small Apostolic Groups are not. They are free floating and exist independently in the parish.⁴⁵⁸ The parish-based SCCs follow a communion of the small communities’ praxis and theology and the newer term -- a solidarity of the small communities’ praxis and theology.

⁴⁵⁷ Pamela Adinda, email message to the author, 9 July, 2015.

⁴⁵⁸ Pierre Hegy points out that some parishes have become “supermarkets of ministries and devotions,” *Wake Up Lazarus! On Catholic Renewal*, Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2011, p. 254. Three successful examples of Small Apostolic Group ministry in parishes in the USA

A key document is the [Checklist of 16 Common Activities in Small Christian Communities \(SCCs\) in Africa Today](#) that highlights the wide range of SCC activities, experiences and projects. In SCC meetings, workshops and seminars we ask: How many of the following activities are part of the life of your SCC? How many of these activities have you actually participated in? Based on new experiences and data we continue to update this list.

Comparing SCCs worldwide, the SCCs in the AMECEA Region have certain strong points.⁴⁵⁹ The key characteristics of a weekly lectionary-based Faith-sharing⁴⁶⁰ meeting, following the charism of a Patron or Patroness saint and being a pastoral priority integrally connected to the parish structures, ministries and activities⁴⁶¹ help maintain a strong and consistent SCC Catholic identity⁴⁶² and focus.

Pius Rutechura emphasizes:

There is the power behind the names in Small Christian Communities. Names mostly drawn from saints, shape both the identity and a sense of belonging. The building of Small Christian Communities reflect the identity within the neighborhood, parish and even leadership. Names define what the community stands for in terms of values, bonding and activities that are carried out up to the parish and even diocesan levels. It is a strong wish and recommendation that hopefully there could be more catechisis on

are: JustFaith Ministries (JFM) that provide a USA parish-based formation program that transforms people and expands their commitment to social ministry (an intensive adult formation program in Catholic Social Teaching (CST), the RCIA (adult catechumenate program) and Alpha that originated in England and has become worldwide. They provide valuable resource materials to our SCCs in Eastern Africa.

⁴⁵⁹ It is always a good learning experience to see how others see us. American Maryknoll Superior General Father Edward Dougherty, MM gives a good summary when he says that in Africa “Small Christian Communities enable local people to develop their own leaders, grow in their faith and work for social progress.” Michael Gable, “Maryknoll’s 100 Years of Mission,” *St. Anthony Messenger*, October, 2011.

⁴⁶⁰ This term or expression has evolved out of many years of and trial and error in Eastern Africa and seems the best way of describing the experience and process.

⁴⁶¹ After many years of being asked how our Eastern Africa SCCs are different, I try to explain that in the African SCC Model of Church these SCCs are not just optional Small Apostolic Groups, but are a pastoral priority integrally connected to the structures, ministries and activities of the parish. When people in the USA tell me that they want to start (or join) a SCC, what I find is that most of the time what they really want to start is a small support group or a small prayer group that is different from a genuine SCC.

⁴⁶² At a car workshop in downtown Nairobi in July, 2011 during an informal conversation I mentioned to the foreman that I was a Catholic priest and he immediately said: “I am a Catholic too. I belong to Maria Consolata Parish and Maria Consolata is my *Jumuiya* too. We meet every Friday.” This little incident reveals how the Catholic identity is more and more bound up with the SCC (*Jumuiya*).

emulating the virtues of particular Patron/Patroness saints at various levels of witnessing Christian faith by community members.⁴⁶³

Segeja stresses:

Choosing of a Patron saint or name of a SCC is also very important. The name given to a SCC should take into consideration the vision of the community itself. This will help to articulate the identity of the community and the role it should play in the parish as communion of SCCs. It is important that the SCCs members understand what their unique identity within the context of the parish is.⁴⁶⁴

Our tradition in Eastern Africa of the SCCs of having Patron or Patroness saints is important. These saints are especially remembered on their specific feast days and on All Saints Day on 1 November. We can positively influence USA and Europe where SCCs are often called only “The Wednesday Afternoon Group” or “Mary’s Friday Evening Group.”

While the challenge of continuing strong and active SCCs exists everywhere, it seems that in some parts of the world small Faith-sharing/faith reflection groups tend to lose their enthusiasm and dynamism after a period of time.⁴⁶⁵ So these SCCs need a renewal every ten years or so. One of the many new creative parish and academic institutions spiritual renewal

⁴⁶³ Pius Rutechura, “Pastoral Vision” in Krämer and Vellguth, *Small Christian Communities*, p. 274.

⁴⁶⁴ Nicholas Segeja in “Small Christian Communities: A Vital Icon,” p. 23.

⁴⁶⁵ It has been pointed out that excellent renewal organizations, processes and programs such as RENEW International start many SCCs in a diocese or parish in the USA. The ideal is that these SCCs become part of a permanent pastoral plan and structure of the parish, but most of them stop or slow down over a period of time. RENEW tries to keep the momentum by offering many varieties and modules of ministries, renewal experiences and processes of spiritual renewal such as “Advent Awakenings,” “ARISE: Together in Christ,” “Creation at the Crossroads,” “Lenten Longings,” and “Why Catholic?” Research shows that like with many Small Apostolic Groups, sometimes the small community members jell/bond/connect, sometimes they don’t. Many factors are involved. One main reasons that these SCCs slow down is that they are an optional parish program and not a pastoral model of church integrally and permanently connected to the parish structures.

programs and retreats⁴⁶⁶ is used to revive, refresh or jumpstart them.⁴⁶⁷ Or a parish offers an optional small Faith-sharing/faith reflection group module from time to time during the Advent and Lenten seasons. Often after these renewal programs have finished, participants have a felt need to live their faith in a deeper way. Some join an existing SCC in the parish or start a new SCC. Others get involved in social outreach programs like prison ministry.

In Eastern Africa weekly lectionary-based Faith-sharing⁴⁶⁸ is the foundation of the SCCs. See the difference from the USA explained in the author's email message to Tom Reese:

“I continue to do research and writing on Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the USA. This fall, 2015 I am focusing on:

1. Small Faith-sharing Groups on college campuses.

⁴⁶⁶ Examples (alphabetically) in the USA include “ACTS (Adoration, Community, Theology, Service),” “Alpha,” “Amazing Parish,” “Antioch,” “Be My Witness” (RENEW International), “ChristLife,” “Christ Renews His Parish (CRHP),” “Cornerstone,” “Cursillo,” Disciples in Mission, “Evangelizing Catholic,” “Discovering Christ,” “Evangelical Catholic (EC),” “Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS),” “Holy Family,” “JustFaith,” “Marriage Encounter,” “RCIA,” “Rock,” “St. Paul’s Outreach (SPO),” “Walk to Emmaus,” and “Why Catholic?” Spiritual renewal programs occur at specific times like the 2000 Jubilee year or a special Holy Year or the anniversary of a diocese.

ACTS Retreats are very popular now in states like Texas. But the question remains: After an ACTS Retreat what? Catholics should be encouraged to participate in SCCs not just as a strategy or plan of the parish, but as a way of life.

⁴⁶⁷ Christ the King Parish, New Vernon, New Jersey, USA tried a different approach. It is a parish of 900 Catholic families that includes the “Community of the Gathered” (220 Catholic families who participate in Mass on Sunday). The parish leadership is exploring how to reach out to the Community of the “Others” (680 Catholic families who still belong to the parish but are inactive for a variety of reasons). Rather than bring in a renewal program from the outside and top down, the parish leadership decided to begin slowly from the bottom up. They had a Pilot Project of Lectionary-based Faith-sharing for about 15 lay people in the parish on three consecutive Tuesday evenings: 9, 16 and 23 July 2013. After an evaluation they started a new Pilot Project in the Advent Season of Fall, 2013. This included starting SCCs (groups of 6-8 people) that combine weekly lectionary-based Faith-sharing and *Lectio Divina* on four Wednesdays; 13 and 20 November and 4 and 11 December, 2013. Parishioners have a choice of a morning session at 10 a.m. or an evening session at 7:30 p.m. The pastor states: “I am very excited about bringing Small Christian Communities to Christ the King. It will be our special way of participating in the New Evangelization that our recent Popes Paul VI, John Paul II, Benedict XVI and Francis have called Catholics to proclaim.” Small Christian Communities Facebook Page, retrieved 10 October, 2013, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Small-Christian-Communities/279921983315>

⁴⁶⁸ This is more than just reading, reflecting on and applying *Bible* readings. It is a way of life for the serious Christian. “Lectionary-based” includes integrating the spirit and practice of the church’s liturgical cycle including the different liturgical seasons, special masses, special devotions, the feasts and the lives of the saints, etc.

2. Weekly lectionary-based Faith-sharing in SCCs. Your comment that I have used in my free online Ebook remains a big challenge:

American theologian Father Tom Reese, SJ states emphatically: “Lectionary-based Catholics can change the world.” In other words, Catholics who individually, in their families or in their SCCs in the middle of the week seriously reflect on the readings of the following Sunday and their application to our lives can transform themselves and their world. Reese adds:

The [Catholic] Church needs a massive *Bible* education program. The church needs to acknowledge that understanding the *Bible* is more important than memorizing the catechism. If we could get Catholics to read the Sunday Scripture readings each week before they come to Mass, it would be revolutionary. If you do not read and pray the Scriptures, you are not an adult Christian. Catholics who become evangelicals understand this.

My research indicates that sadly American Catholics still do not “get it.” Here are two examples:

1. My cousins in Concord, Massachusetts, USA were very involved in the successful 2008--2012 “ARISE: Together in Christ” Process (facilitated by RENEW International) in Boston Archdiocese. Now the over-riding, ongoing question is “After ARISE what?” Here is a section from an email that they received from the Director of Faith Formation in their parish.

“There has been a lot of focus over the past 20 years concerning Smaller Faith Communities within larger entities like a parish. Twenty-five years ago while at Sacred Heart in Lexington we offered a parish mission whose follow-up was to invite adult parishioners into small groupings for prayer, book discussion, collective activities, etc. After all these years I am still part of a group that includes folks from Bedford, Burlington, Lexington and Cambridge -- the common denominator having been a small faith group at Sacred Heart.”

The three examples of the follow-up to ARISE in Concord do not directly include *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection. Five of the original ARISE Small Groups have decided to continue as Small Book Groups that meet monthly.

2. My brother Tommy’s parish here in Paterson Diocese, New Jersey for many years had a small group that met in the middle of the week to reflect on the Three Readings of the following Sunday. Now the members have decided to use a new format. Each week they read and reflect on one chapter of one Gospel consecutively until the end. Right now it is *Mark*.

All good things, but... We still have a long way to go in the USA to respond to your challenge to have weekly lectionary-based Faith-sharing in our SCCs. May the Holy Spirit inspire us.”

In addition to being weekly lectionary-based Faith-sharing small groups, for 46 years (1973-2019) the SCCs in Eastern Africa, without “new renewal programs,” have been

regularly renewed, reenergized, revitalized and updated through their own on-going African resources that constantly read and respond to the contemporary signs of the times such as:

- The challenging themes of the AMECEA Plenary Meetings that take place every three years. The 18th AMECEA Plenary Assembly will take place in Lilongwe, Malawi from 16-26 July, 2014 on the theme “New Evangelization through True Conversion and Witnessing to the Christian Faith.”
- The 1994 First African Synod that promoted the theme "The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission towards the Year 2000" with five main topics: "Proclamation of the Good News of Salvation", "Inculturation", "Dialog", "Justice and Peace" and the "Means of Social Communications."
- The Jubilee Year in 2000.
- The 2009 Second African Synod that promoted the theme "The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace."
- The whole process and implementation of the 2012 World Synod of Bishops on “The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith.”
- Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962-2012) and the 20th anniversary of the publication of *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992-2012).
- Year of Faith 2012-2013.
- The whole process and implementation of the 2014 and 2015 World Synods of Bishops on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization."
- Periodic African Catholic Church campaigns with their challenging themes and activities such as the yearly Kenya Lenten Campaign that focuses on justice and peace.
- Weekly lectionary-based Faith-sharing materials produced for special occasions such as the RSCK materials for the 2013 General Elections in Kenya.
- Special events in a country or diocese such as anniversaries, jubilees and formation/education programs.

Part of this qualitative evaluation has been to study the influence of SCCs on the use and the importance of the *Bible*⁴⁶⁹ in the lives and ministries of Catholics in Eastern Africa. Some of the important questions we asked are:

⁴⁶⁹ As of 1 September, 2014 there were 496 references to the *Bible* in the free, online Ebook on “SCCs in Africa” on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website.

- How many SCC members (individuals and families) have personal *Bibles* in their homes?
- How important is the oral tradition in understanding the *Bible* especially among people who are illiterate in Africa and those who live in rural areas?
- How many have the *Bible* on their Smartphones,⁴⁷⁰ tablets and computers?
- How many use the parish leaflets that contain the Scripture readings of the following Sunday?
- How many read the *Bible* on a regular basis?
- How many read the Scripture readings of the following Sunday ahead of time?
- How many go beyond a private reading of the *Bible* to connect/apply the Scripture readings to our daily lives and local situations?
- How many identify life situations and everyday events in the *Bible* (similar to the Group Response Method/*Bible* -- Mirror Method of Lumko, South Africa)?⁴⁷¹
- How many feel more confident and capable to discuss the *Bible* with Protestant and Muslim friends and neighbors – and even hostile people?

The results are mixed. Certainly many Catholics have learned about the importance and centrality of the *Bible* through participation in their SCCs. *Bibles* are available in many African languages and at affordable prices. A wide variety of *Bible* Reflection Methods are used in the AMECEA countries. More and more SCCs have left the “Prayer Group Stage” and connect/apply the Scripture readings to their daily lives and local situations. Research indicates that the two most important characteristics of successful, vibrant SCCs are the centrality of *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection and the practical action/social outreach.

But many Catholic homes still do not have their personal *Bibles*.⁴⁷² In workshops and seminars we use the saying that traditionally *a farmer does not go to the farm or garden*

⁴⁷⁰ A SCC member in Nairobi told me that during the coffee break at her workplace there was a question about a particular *Bible* text. One of her colleagues simply opened the *Bible* on her Smartphone and answered the question. In our SCCs courses and workshops participants find relevant Bible passages much more quickly using a Smartphone than a paper Bible.

⁴⁷¹ Paul Bere points out: “The impact of the oral culture in Africa calls for further research in order to make room for the biblical text in our daily life! The questionnaire could include a question on reference to a word, an image, or a scene from the *Bible* in life situations, as we usually do when we use proverbs. Therefore, it is not the use of the *Bible* in life situations in general (from *Bible* text to Life), but the reference to the *Bible* text in life (life situation to *Bible* texts). The technique draws from the proverbs tradition.” Email to the author dated 17 November, 2013.

⁴⁷² This is an on-going problem and challenge. It is part of the history of African culture that has been mainly oral and not a book culture. Research shows that many Africans like free books, but do not put a priority on buying books. One Kenyan Evangelical pastor in Nairobi

without a hoe. A contemporary saying is *people do not travel without their smartphones*. Making the parallel, many SCC members still do not go to their weekly *Bible* Reflection Services with their *Bibles*. If there is a workshop or seminar on the *Bible*, many participants don't remember to bring their *Bibles*. Yet many Catholics will carry their rosaries. This shows the strong devotional side of African Catholicism.

A number of SCC members study the *Bible* mainly to refute the false teachings of biased Evangelical (especially Pentecostals) and Muslim preachers and teachers. Some SCC members who regularly use *Missals* with the Sunday Readings included in their weekly meetings have never become familiar with using the *Bible* by itself. For example, they have trouble finding a particular gospel or a letter written by St. Paul. *Bible* literacy and regular reading of the *Bible* is still a hope rather than a reality.

Yet the dramatic increase in Smartphones, tablets and other mobile devices help SCC members to carry and access the *Bible* or Sunday Readings regularly. *Bible* passages such as the readings of the following Sunday are easily available as free automatic text messages, audio links and daily email messages.

On our 2014 SCCs Class exam at Tangaza University College I asked the question: "How can the internet and the social media/new media/social networking help in the formation and training of SCC leaders/animators/facilitators/coordinators in Africa?" Some answers:

- With a smartphone a person can read the *Breviary* in a *matatu* (small bus) on the way to school.
- On my smartphone I have a program called "*Gaudete*" that has the day's *Bible* reading, commentary, homily, and *Breviary* Reading. What a grace!

Our qualitative evaluation has studied the influence of ecumenism and inter-religious dialog in the development of SCCs in Eastern Africa. Ecumenical involvement varies from country to country, from diocese to diocese and from local area to local area. It has often been pointed out that African Christians generally want to work together and cooperate with each other especially on the local level. They don't want to inherit the classical divisions of the Christian denominations of the West. Especially in urban areas African of different Christian denominations and religious faiths live side by side. In the traditional African spirit of community, unity and hospitality, neighborhood Catholic SCCs are inclusive. Christians of other denominations participate in the following: social activities such as the celebrations of marriages, graduations, year-end parties and national patriotic events; visiting the sick; bereavement at time of deaths in the local community; and outreach programs such as community healthcare, visiting people with HIV and AIDS, visiting prisoners and self-help campaigns to fix up the neighborhood.

told me that even in his church, where the *Bible* is central, some of the church members spend a lot of money to invite him to an elaborate meal in their home, but do not have personal *Bibles*. Issac Maina in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya, October, 2011.

We try to use humor to explain and to teach. We joke with the African men and ask: Why do you have enough money to buy a beer, but not a book about SCCs?

Depending on the location Muslims and members of African Religions living in the neighborhood also participate. In the neighborhood SCCs in the villages in rural areas in Eastern Africa Catholic and members of African Regions live side by side and share many aspects of everyday life. In urban areas that are predominantly Muslims tensions sometimes arise, but most people want to live peacefully together.

Research in Nairobi shows that there is very little official ecumenical dialog and communications on the local level between the different Christian Churches. In general, the different small communities of the different Christian denominations do not formally share their experiences with each other. This is a challenge for all of us. But at the same time Christians of different denominations are welcome to participate in the general activities of the Catholic SCCs.

A particular challenge is where a committed member of a SCC has a husband or wife who is not a Catholic. Sometimes the person who is not a Catholic does not want the SCC to meet in his or her home. In other cases the witness and example of the SCC members has encouraged the person who is not a Catholic to join the Catholic Church.

No. 9 in the [Checklist](#) states:

The SCC is responsible for assisting (called “animating”) in the Sunday Mass in the parish, subparish or outstation on a rotation basis. Cleaning the church, supplying the readers, taking the collection, bringing up the gifts at the Offertory including a special collection/donation from the SCC members for the self-reliance of the parish including material goods for the rectory (priests’ house) and for the poor and needy.

In some parishes the SCC of the week is responsible for cleaning the whole church compound and for supplying the readers for the daily masses too.

In addition to these regular weekly pastoral responsibilities, SCCs participate in particular prayer and pastoral activities during Holy Week. On Holy Thursday SCCs take turns animating the prayer periods during the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament that has been solemnly reserved after the Evening Mass of the Lord’s Supper.⁴⁷³ On Good Friday SCCs take turns animating the different stations of the outdoor Way of the Cross.⁴⁷⁴ During

⁴⁷³ Supper has many meanings in English and in Western culture where family meals together are getting less and less frequent and less important. The Swahili translation of supper is *karamu* that means “feast” and more accurately describes the importance of the Last Supper on Holy Thursday – in both the Jewish (Passover Meal) and Christian (institution of the Sacrament of the Eucharist/Mass) traditions.

⁴⁷⁴ If African SCCs are a new way of being church, they are challenged to use inculturated “Ways of the Cross” such as the “African Way of the Cross Following Our Local African Situation Especially the Sufferings, Crosses, and Problems of Our Everyday Life,” the “AIDS Way of the Cross,” the “Ecological Way of the Cross” and “Njia ya Msalaba Kunlingana na Mazingira Yetu ya Afrika” (Swahili for a “Way of the Cross That is Like Our African Environment”). Available in different media such as a printed text, posters and slides. Also the DVD: *A Meditation on the Way of the Cross*, 50 minutes, Nairobi: Paulines Audiovisuals Production, 2008.

the Easter Vigil SCCs accompany their members during the Baptism of adults in the RCIA. On Easter Sunday and Easter Monday SCCs host parties for the newly baptized.

In this overall qualitative evaluation a certain pattern emerges again and again. In the history of a particular SCC or a plan of SCCs in a parish there is an ongoing dying and rising, periods of ups and downs, times of inactivity and activity. Much depends on leadership. A priest committed to SCCs is transferred to another parish. A new pastor comes who may or may not be interested in SCCs. A dynamic lay leader moves to another part of the diocese or country. The SCC treasurer walks off with the money, and the SCC members get discouraged and the activities of the group stop. Several new members bring fresh energy to the group.

Another approach in evaluating SCCs is to experience the daily life and identity of an Eastern African SCC. One way is for the parish priest or the pastoral agent or a visitor to walk around the geographical area of a SCC and meet the SCC members in their homes and experience their ordinary daily activities on the local level. This is what Pope Francis has famously calls “smelling the sheep.” Look at this short Case Study:

On Friday, 16 May, 2014 a priest visitor from Latin America visited St. Kizito SCC located in Waruku, an informal settlement area in Nairobi, Kenya. It is one of the 10 neighborhood, parish-based SCCs in St Austin’s Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese. The visitor did not participate in the weekly *Bible Service* on Sunday afternoon or a specific SCC activity. He just experienced the ordinary life of the SCC members. The priest first visited Kenyan layman and Chairperson Josphat Mulinya (called the “servant” of the “servants” in Swahili) of the SCC in his small home. They discussed the reality of living in simple rented one-room or two room houses in Waruku that do not have indoor plumbing. Tenants carrying water in plastic containers from a nearby water tank. There is a common toilet and shower for residents in the compound. Josphat briefed the visitor on the various SCC members and the overall activities of the SCC.

Then in a walking tour they met various SCC members. Everywhere people referred to our *jumuiya*: Two Kenyan laywomen just returning from a meeting of one of the local Cooperative Groups (called *chama*⁴⁷⁵ or circle or club or kitty party or merry-go-round association or communal bank) where

⁴⁷⁵ Nearly one out of every two women in Kenya is a member of a women’s saving group, that are voluntary groups formed to help women overcome barriers to financial participation and support. Called *chamas* these groups allow women to mobilize savings and collectively invest to improve their livelihoods by contributing a certain amount of money to a pooled fund. More and more men are joining these groups. Recent statistics indicate that women have a 95% repayment rate and men have a 50-70% repayment rate.

Irish Medical Missionaries of Mary Sister Patricia Lanigan, MMM makes the interesting point that SCCs provide a very good infrastructure for these kind of saving groups. SCC members know and trust each other. There is a community spirit and support. There is a spirit of forgiveness for bad loans.

Conversation with Patricia Lanigan, Nairobi, Kenya, 31 August, 2015.

members contribute to a revolving fund and can get small loans. These groups are very popular and many SCC members participate. Kenyan lay woman Agnes Wangala who showed the visitor the workroom and products of the St. Agatha Joy Women's Training and Tailoring Group that is the name of the sewing club of women in the SCC. Kenya layman Daniel Mutinda who showed how he sets up one of the rooms in his house as a Sports Hall or Parlor. 100 people at 30/= Kenyan shillings (\$0.35) a person squeeze in the room to watch international football (soccer) matches like the World Cup and English Premier League. The priest visitor gave a blessing to a SCC member sick with the flu. In one sense nothing "happened" during in the afternoon, but the spirit and identity of the SCC came through clearly.

In our ongoing qualitative research, one clear way of reading the contemporary signs of the times in Eastern Africa and other parts of Africa is to analyze the recent titles/topics/themes of the Doctorate Dissertations, Master's Theses, Diploma Essays and Long Essays on "Small Christian Communities" at the various colleges connected to CUEA and other educational institutions in Eastern Africa, other parts of Africa and specific universities abroad.⁴⁷⁶ Research has taken place in the following African (and other) countries: Angola, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, India, Ivory Coast, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. African students have done research in Philippines and other countries. An increasing number of these titles/topics/themes are comparative studies.

1. *An Analysis of Participative Structures in Selected Particular Churches in Eastern Africa in Light of the 1983 Code of Canon Law*
2. *Building a Participatory Church -- An Ecclesiological and Pastoral Analysis of the Small Christian Communities*
3. *Building, Strengthening and Sustaining Small Christian Communities in an Urban Set-up in Nairobi, Kenya: A Case Study in Holy Trinity Catholic Parish in Kariobangi North, Nairobi, Kenya.*
4. *Challenges Facing Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Diocese of Nakuru, Kenya: Case of Mary Mother of God, Rongai Parish.*
5. *Comparing Two Models of the Catholic Church: SCC Model of Church and Apostolic Association Model of Church: A Case Study at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Nairobi, Kenya.*
6. *Consciousness-raising for the Active Participation of Small Christian Community Members as Agents of Social Transformation Through Evangelization in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya.*
7. *Critique of the Trinitarian Social Model of Leonardo Boff: Small Christian Communities of the Archdiocese of Tabora in Tanzania, a Case Study.*

⁴⁷⁶ Our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team Fund helps to pay for six copies of each thesis to be placed in the libraries of Catholic universities in the Nairobi area and in the AMECEA Office Library.

8. *The Cultural Influence of Basic Christian Communities (BECs) For the Greater Unity of the Catholic Church in the Philippines (Casay Anini-y Antique).*
9. *Ecclesiology of Communion in the Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Dioceses of Mzuzu and Karonga in Malawi (1961-2016).*
10. *Effective Pastoral Leadership in the SCCs for Evangelization in Tigania Deanery, Meru Catholic Diocese, Kenya*
11. *Efficient Financial Management in the Parish as a Way to Achieve Self-Reliance: A Case Study of Tabora Deanery, Tanzania.*
12. *Enhancing the Spirit of Communion in Small Christian Communities: A Case Study in the Archdiocese of Mombasa, Kenya.*
13. *An Evaluation of the Practice of Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection/Bible-Life Connections in Small Christian Communities in Africa: A Case Study of Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Nairobi, Kenya.*
14. *Faith-Based Communities as Social Actors for the Transformation of Society: Case Study of the Small Christian Communities in Kawagware Division, Nairobi County, Kenya.*
15. *Forgiveness As An Intervention for the Radicalization of Youth to Violence in St. Theresa Catholic Church and Riyadh Mosque in Eastleigh Area, Nairobi County, Kenya.*
16. *"The Formation of Small Christian Communities as a Model for Evangelization in Shendam Diocese, Nigeria."*
17. *The Growth of Online Small Christians Community Gatherings in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya.*
18. *How Active Participation of Men in Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Can Strengthen the Faith of the Family in Kenya Today: A Case Study of Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish, Karen, Nairobi, Kenya.*⁴⁷⁷
19. *The Identity of the Christian Community in Africa: A Study of the Pastoral Methods in the Thoughts of Patrick A. Kalilombe.*
20. *Impact of Economic Status on Small Christian Communities in Nairobi, Kenya: A Case Study of St. Michael the Archangel Parish, Otiende, Nairobi.*
21. *Impact of Small Christian Communities on Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in St. Michael's Parish, Abidjan Archdiocese, Ivory Coast.*
22. *Impact of Small Christian Communities on Youth in Kenya.*

⁴⁷⁷ This is the title of a 2015 MA Thesis in Pastoral Ministry from Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA offered through Tangaza University College in Nairobi. It is a critical theological reflection based on 150 hours of supervised pastoral ministry called the "Practicum." The student submitted a "Dossier on the Insertion Experience." Neighborhood, parish-based SCCs provide an ideal practical, pastoral context.

23. *Implementation of Small Christian Communities as a Pastoral Priority in the Church in Kenya: Opportunities and Challenges.*
24. *Improving Participation of the Laity in Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Challenge in the Archdiocese of Lilongwe, Malawi.*
25. *Influence of Small Christian Communities on the Character Formation of Youth: A Case Study at Kenyatta University.*
26. *The Involvement/Participation of Women in Small Christian Communities -- St. Leopold Parish, Shangombo, Diocese of Livingstone, Zambia.*
27. *Julius K. Nyerere's Ujamaa Community Philosophy. Its Significance for the Building of Small Christian Communities.*
28. *Laity Retrieving the Lost Heritage: A Scientific Study on the Effectiveness of SCC in the Archdiocese of Bombay*
29. *The Liturgical Celebration of the Word of God is the Summit of the Manifestation of God.*
30. *Low Participation of Young People in Young People Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs): A Case Study of St. Austin's Parish, Msongari, Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya.*
31. *Missionary Spirituality of the Laity in Small Christian Communities of Same, Tanzania.*
32. *The Participation of the Lay Faithful in the Catholic Church: A Study on Rumuruti Consolata Parish of the Diocese of Nyahururu, Kenya.*
33. *A Pastoral Approach towards the Reawakening of Small Christian Communities in St. Charles Lwanga Catholic Parish, Lwangiri, Uganda.*
34. *Good Parish Management and Coordination: A Case Study of St. Francis Xavier Olosipa Parish, Catholic Archdiocese of Arusha, Tanzania.*
35. *Pastoral Response to Low Youth Participation in Small Christian Communities (SCCs): A Case Study of Holy Trinity Buruburu One Parish, Nairobi Archdiocese.*
36. *Pastoral Solutions to the Obstacles in the Growth of Small Christian Communities in St. Massimo Parish -- Meru Diocese, Kenya.*
37. *Pastoral Care of Small Christian Communities, the Means Towards Deep Evangelization.*
38. *Promotion of Small Christian Communities in Masvingo Diocese, Zimbabwe: An Icon For Pastoral and Missionary Renewal.*
39. *The Role of SCCs in Mission and Evangelization in Malindi Diocese, Kenya.*
40. *The Sacramental Ecclesiology of Avery Dulles and It's Possible Influence on the Church of Sierra Leone.*

41. *The Small Christian Communities Are Pastoral Priority of the Church In Tanzania*
42. *Small Christian Communities and Development in Cameroon.*
43. *Small Christian Communities and the Luo Traditional Communal Living in Mara Region of Tanzania: A Comparative Analysis.*
44. *Small Christian Communities as a New Way of Being Church: A Challenge to the Binja Parish Youth in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.*
45. *Small Christian Communities as Agents of Justice, Peace and Reconciliation: A Case Study of Holy Mother of God Catholic Church – Githurai, Nairobi, Kenya.*
46. *Small Christian Communities as Agents of New Evangelization in Kenya.*
47. *Small Christian Communities as Agents of New Evangelization in the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya.*
48. *Small Christian Community (SCC) as a Platform for Continuous Catechesis in Eastern Africa -- Opportunities and Challenges: Case Study of Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish South B, Nairobi, Kenya.*
49. *Small Christian Communities as Privileged Places of Love, Service and Solidarity: A Case Study of Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Ngong Diocese, Kenya.*
50. *Small Christian Communities as a Way of Deepening Christian Faith in Angola: A Case Study of Mbanza Kongo Diocese.*
51. *Small Christian Communities as a Way of Evangelization in Eastern Africa under AMECEA.*
52. *Social Differences in Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Challenge for Deeper Evangelization in Nairobi-West Deanery, Kenya.*
53. *Towards Prophetic Involvement in Fostering God's Reign: An Interdisciplinary⁴⁷⁸ Study on Basic Ecclesial Communities as a New Way of Being Church in India.*
54. *Women's Role in Small Christian Communities in Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish, South B, Nairobi, Kenya: Challenges and Opportunities.*

It is significant that in assessing especially these Master's Theses and Long Essays on SCCs that I have been supervising/reading especially at Tangaza University College and CUEA, the weakest part is the lack of concrete, practical suggestions in the "Final Recommendations" or the "Pastoral Recommendations" or the "Pastoral Strategies." These are an essential part of either the

1. Fourth step (Action/Pastoral Planning) or Fifth Step (Pastoral Planning and Evaluation) in the Pastoral Spiral process/methodology.
2. The Third or "Act" Step in the "See," "Discern" and "Act" process/methodology.

⁴⁷⁸ Some of the interdisciplinary papers include comparisons to SCCs in Africa.

The authors give the “what,” but not the “how” (including the finances), the “when” and the “where.” For example, they write: “We need to attract more youth to join SCCs” without saying “how,” “when” and “where.” Or they write “SCC members should read the *Bible* more, without saying “how,” “when” and “where.” These general pastoral recommendations are not that helpful. They are too much “in the air” and not focused enough.

Another approach is to track the evaluation of SCCs in international conferences. A conference on “Paul VI and the Church in Africa” took place in Nairobi, Kenya on 1-2 August, 2012. In the opening speech Cardinal Pengo presented Venerable Pope Paul VI’s two challenges of “missionaries to yourselves” and “inculturation” (“You may and you must have an African Christianity”). He said that one of the greatest responses of the Church in Africa to Venerable Pope Paul VI’s two challenges is the establishment and growth of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa as well as other regions in Africa.

Pengo’s key points on SCC members being missionaries to themselves:

1. SCCs are centers of communion, evangelization and missionary outreach.
2. SCCs are self-ministering and self-propagating.
3. SCCs offer opportunities for formation and training.
4. Leaders of the SCCs are lay people who participate in a new way of being church.

Pengo’s key points on SCC members promoting inculturation:

1. The aim is to make the Catholic Church more “African” and close to the people.
2. SCCs offer a sense of belonging where real relationships can be experienced.
3. Christianity is lived in local communities in which everyday life and work take place.
4. SCCs are the most concrete expression of the Church as family Model of Church.⁴⁷⁹

At the same conference DRC Cardinal Laurent Monsengwo, the Archbishop of Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) integrated the “missionary to yourselves” and “inculturation” challenges in describing the development of non-ordained lay ministries through the Living Ecclesial Communities in DRC. He said:

In 1977 in the Democratic Republic of the Congo the Catholic Church set up non-ordained ministries on the Living Ecclesial Communities’ level: the Ministries of President of the Community, Teacher, Family Counselor and Comforter of the Sick People while leaving the opportunity to create other ministries according to the need and circumstances. These lay ministries paved the way for the rapid expansion of laity’s commitment in the church.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ Summary of Polycarp Pengo, “Missionaries to Yourselves: The Legacy of Vatican II and the Identity of the Church in Africa,” Conference on “Paul VI and the Church in Africa,” Nairobi: Kenya: Unpublished Paper, 1 August, 2012, pp. 4-5.

⁴⁸⁰ Laurent Monsengwo, “The Legacy of the Paul VI Teaching for the African Church Today,” Conference on “Paul VI and the Church in Africa,” Nairobi: Kenya: Unpublished Paper, 2 August, 2012, p. 4.

A recent 2013 evaluation states:

One of the most encouraging things is to see how much the local bishops, clergy, religious and the laity are responding to the need to plant the SCCs seeds within their localities and equally their efforts to ensure that the planted seed is well weeded and has enough water to assist it grow into a big tree just like the biblical mustard seed.”⁴⁸¹

An ongoing evaluation of the qualitative growth of SCCs in Eastern Africa has to continually track the changing social, economic, political and religious context to assess the emerging obstacles and challenges. Ngalula insightfully points out:

Today some situations in Africa lead to the instability or even the disappearance of BCCs. On the one hand, war and political instability force people – especially in rural areas – to leave their home or even the country. On the other hand, the situation of economic instability and poverty force people to spend most of their time searching for something to survive. Then many Catholics have not enough time to participate in the BCC activities. BCCs require a minimum of peace and stability to really be the “Church in the Neighborhood.”

The social, political and economic instability of many countries in Africa provokes a massive rush to specific devotional groups either within in the Catholic Church or in the New Religious Movements with their promise for miracles and their teaching that the solution will come from God only after of long prayers. This is a big competition for BCCs that which seem to be rather stern with their method of “See-Judge-Act” that does not allow people to take refuge in spiritual practices while escaping from the hard realities of life. Some people prefer to choose the seemingly easier way and leave the BCCs.⁴⁸²

Our qualitative evaluation is ongoing and integrates new SCC experiences. Austrian missionary priest Father Hans Humer regularly documents the development of SCCs in Kayanga Parish, Kayanga Diocese, Western Tanzania. Particularly valuable is the local, grassroots “feel” of his reports. Here is one summary for March and April, 2014:

We are having seminars and meetings for strengthening our Small Christian Communities (SCCs). On Ash Wednesday we began Lent. The faithful received with large participation in the morning and in the afternoon the sign of the ashes. Every Friday there is the liturgical celebration of the Way of the Cross. Preparations for Easter are going on well in Kayanga Parish. We make in all our 10 outstations again short “half day” retreats. The faithful are happy about it and they are receiving them well. The new chapel in

⁴⁸¹ Njuguna, Francis, “SCCs and the Future of Pastoral Mission,” *National Mirror*, 1:5 (May, 2013), 14.

⁴⁸² Ngalula in Moerschbacher, *Proceedings of the International Symposium*, p. 5.

Kibombo is nearly finished – there are only some small finishing touches to complete around the entrance. In Ruzinga and Kasharara (close to the spring water sources), a fence was built around the parish/diocesan land. In the future this will help to plant trees and not get repeatedly damage from “wandering” goats or cattle.

Bishop Almachius Vincent Rweyongeza came back well from Rome with the blessing of Pope Francis. He explained to us about the cordial meetings especially the Metropolitan Teams with Pope Francis and a celebration of mass together with Archbishop Protase Rugambwa who comes from our Kayanga Diocese. 2014 is the “Year of Small Christian Communities” (SCCs). The preparations for the beginning of “accounting” (*Sensa* in Swahili) all faithful are on the way to be worked out. This exercise will be connected also with spiritual lessons and will help to strengthen the community life.⁴⁸³

SCCs patterns vary according to the local context. In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania many SCCs meet weekly at 6:30 a.m. on Saturday morning. This is the “best” time for many members. SCC activities are spread out throughout the week. Many Catholic find a spiritual, apostolic and social identity in their SCCs. There are many cultural shifts like more and more Catholic weddings taking place in the afternoon. There are complaints that too many fund-raising activities and collections pass through the SCCs.⁴⁸⁴

Tanzanian laywoman Mrs. Rosemary Kigadye reports from Dar es Salaam: “You cannot do anything in the parish unless you start in the Small Christian Community for endorsement. Pastoral activities like Baptism, Confirmation and Marriage and funerals pass through the SCCs.”⁴⁸⁵

Kenyan diocesan priest Father Joseph Ngala reports from Marafa Parish, Malindi Diocese, Kenya. There are four SCCs at the parish center. After the Christmas, 2014 Mass the SCC members were discouraged and wanted to give up their SCCs. But Ngala encouraged them to persevere and overcome their obstacles. So they started again and are doing well. This reflect the dying and rising pattern in many SCCs in Eastern Africa.⁴⁸⁶

Kenyan diocesan priest Father Francis Ekissa reports from Kocholia Parish, Bungoma Diocese, Kenya. The great majority of SCC members are women,

⁴⁸³ Hans Humer, “News: March -- April 2014 (Lent, Holy Week),” email message dated 19 April, 2014.

⁴⁸⁴ Tanzanian laywoman Irene Kessy in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya, 20 April, 2014.

⁴⁸⁵ Interview with Rosemary Kigadye in Nairobi on 26 June, 2014. She is a member of St. Anne SCC in St. Gaspare del Bufalo Parish.

⁴⁸⁶ Joseph Ngala in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya, 20 January, 2015.

especially older women and widows. An increasing number of members, especially the economically better off, do not come to the weekly meetings, but contribute money when requested.⁴⁸⁷

One can expect that factors such as urbanization and secularism/secularization⁴⁸⁸ influence the changing styles and patterns of SCCs in Eastern Africa. In some parishes of the city periphery and the housing estates there is a half-developed form of SCCs that is sometimes called a “block system” or “cell system.” The geographical parish area is divided into neighbourhood areas. People of such “blocks” or “cells” meet in one of their homes, pray together, share their experiences, organize neighborly help, report to the parish council. The priests realize they need these blocks for the administration of the parish, but do not develop them further into genuine, full fledged SCCs.

Our ongoing qualitative evaluation continues to go deeper into the 2011 AMECEA Plenary’s Resolution No. 3: “Enhance Initial and Ongoing Quality Formation of Pastoral Agents at All Levels.” The five SCCs Workshops 2013-2015 in Ethiopia, Malawi, Tanzania (Mwanza Metropolitan), Uganda (Tororo Metropolitan) and Zambia raised specific questions. The elections of lay leaders take place in our parishes every three years starting with the SCC leaders, but many gaps occur. According to the overall pastoral strategy of forming and training SCCs leaders, the new SCC leaders should immediately participate in workshops and seminars to learn their new responsibilities. Tanzanian seminarian Erick Muganyizi from Kayanga Diocese, Tanzania and presently studying theology at St. Paul’s Senior Seminary, Kipalapala writes: “The first thing is training of leaders, then carry out various workshops so that each leader may know his or her work and does it properly.”⁴⁸⁹ Often this does not occur. Many untrained SCCs leaders just jump into their new tasks without a preparatory workshop. Examples would be the SCCs leaders in marriage ministry and justice and peace ministry.

What exactly is the training they receive? Is it in the spirit of SCCs being a new way of being church and a new model of church? Both formation and training are necessary as seen in No. 2 and No. 3 in the future challenges, priorities and actions on page 432.

In a wide ranging conversation with Catholic lay leaders Dr. Peter Kiarie and Mr. Francis Warui,⁴⁹⁰ we focused on the changing trends in Catholic parishes in urban Kenya. There are many parish lay associations and apostolic groups that compete with the time and energy of SCCs members. The number of these associations is growing -- both new local small devotional groups and local branches of international movements. Some SCCs members say that they can’t participate in their weekly SCC gatherings due to the conflicting times of various meetings and activities. Both Kiarie and Warui agree that there two practical

⁴⁸⁷ Francis Ekissa in a conversation with the author in Ngong, Kenya, 13 February, 2015.

⁴⁸⁸ Religion theorists call “secularization” the broad process by which religion gradually loses its social influence.

⁴⁸⁹ Erick Muganyizi, SCCs Facebook Page, retrieved on 4 June, 2014, <https://www.facebook.com/www.smallchristiancommunities.org>

⁴⁹⁰ Author’s conversation with Peter Kiarie and Francis Warui, Nairobi and Nakuru, Kenya, 9 March, 2015.

solutions. First, in urban areas encourage as many SCCs as possible to meet after work in the evenings on weekdays, say 7 to 8 p.m. or 8 to 9 p.m. when the men who have jobs are available. Second, since participation in SCCs is the responsibility of every Catholic (whereas the parish lay associations and apostolic groups are voluntary), Sundays afternoons in the parishes should be reserved only for the meetings and activities of the SCCs. Dandora Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese is a good model.

Warui recalled an animated conversation with a new pastor in his parish in Nairobi who starting making changes immediately after arriving. Francis pointed out to the pastor that he was in the parish for a temporary period of time (three to six years) while the many lay Catholics were in the parish for life. There should be broad consultation before major changes are made.

The process of the two Synods of Bishops encouraged looking for new pastoral solutions for many issues related to family and marriage. Realizing that often the situation is “both... and” rather than “either...or,” some pastoral strategies related to SCCs are:

- So that some poor families are not embarrassed at not being able to serve food and drinks at the weekly SCC meetings, some SCCs have decided to meet at the same home rather than rotate among the homes.
- SCC members should visit Catholic couples or a Catholic with a spouse who is not a Catholic in their homes to discuss the obstacles to their getting married in a Catholic Church. Issues such as paying the dowry should be studied on a case by case basis.
- It is very important that parents marry in the Catholic Church to be a model for their teenage and young adult children.
- More study is needed on the special problems of mixed marriages including how the faith formation of the children is affected.
- It is very important that, when and where possible, husband and wife (father and mother) participate in SCC meetings together to model their joint commitment to their children.

More and more specialized SCCs are developing. “In Kampala Archdiocese there are workplace-based Small Christian Communities like in St. Balikuddembe Market and in Arcades.”⁴⁹¹

44 people participated in a Tororo Metropolitan (Ecclesiastical Province) Workshop on the theme “Building Small Christian Communities for Grassroots Evangelization in Uganda” at the Benedictine Sisters Priory and St. Peter’s College in Tororo, Uganda from 4 to 7 May, 2014.⁴⁹² Participants included representatives from two dioceses in eastern Uganda

⁴⁹¹ Caxton Peter Mayanja, “Involvements of Men in Weekly Small Christian Community Meetings in Bukalagi Parish, Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese,” Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2015, p. 2.

⁴⁹² Reports on this workshop can be found on the AMECEA Website (www.amecea.org) as a report in the 23 May, 2014 *AMECEA Online Newsletter*: [TANZANIA: Catholics are Called to Reflect on the Importance of Various Ministries of the Church](#) and on the SCCs Website under “Tanzania.”

(Tororo Archdiocese and Jinja Diocese): one archbishop, 16 priests, 24 laymen (especially catechists) and 3 laywomen.

In his opening remarks Archbishop Emmanuel Obbo, the Archbishop of Tororo emphasized that “the success of SCCs will be the success of the Local Church in Africa.” In expanding on SCCs as a new way of being church he said, “SCCs are not a project but a life for our Catholic people.” He emphasized the importance of Word of God, but said that Catholics have not yet taken the *Bible* as their book. Laughingly he said that when we see people carrying the *Bible* on the streets in Uganda we say “there go the Born Again Pentecostals.”⁴⁹³

The workshop focused on a participatory learning process that included four small groups by diocese and the formation of six mixed SCCs. This “learning by doing” style showed how we can be enriched by each other’s grassroots SCC experiences as seen in the Ugandan proverb *One hand washes the other*.

The workshop evaluated the development of SCCs “on the ground” in Uganda:

- The Catholic Church in Uganda really started SCCs 20 years late. Even though the AMECEA Pastoral Priority started with the 1973 and 1976 Plenaries, Emeritus Archbishop James Odongo summarized:

By 1969 the political changes in national governments [in Uganda] made meetings difficult, almost impossible. For almost 23 years gatherings or meetings were virtually banned. The climate was too hostile for any meaningful apostolate... By the beginning of 1993, relative peace was restored in our country. Our Pastoral Council had its first meeting in almost 20 years. We all complained that the history of our country had hindered our own pastoral progress for almost those same 20 years.⁴⁹⁴

- Workshop participants reports how different models, and even names, of SCCs emerged in Uganda. The name SCCs was popular in Central, Western and Northern Uganda. Arua Diocese and Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese especially developed very good pastoral models of parish-based SCCs. Using mainly the name Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) a form developed in Eastern Uganda that could be called Small Neighborhood Prayer Groups and Activities Groups. They were mainly a structure of the outstation. *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection was not a regular feature. Members of these prayer

⁴⁹³ Emmanuel Obbo, “Opening Talk,” Tororo Metropolitan (Ecclesiastical Province) Workshop on the theme “Building Small Christian Communities for Grassroots Evangelization in Uganda” Tororo, Uganda, 5 May, 2015.

⁴⁹⁴ James Odongo, “Lifetime Legacy as Shepherd of the People of God in Tororo Archdiocese in Emeritus Archbishop of Tororo James Odongo, *50 Episcopal Golden Jubilee 1965-2015 – February 21, 2015*, Kampala, Uganda, 2015.

groups met daily in their homes to pray the rosary in the months of May and October. BCCs as an activities group met “on need.”⁴⁹⁵

- Using the SEE – JUDGE – ACT reflection process/method on critical problems/challenges in the general society in Uganda: “Corruption” (two SCCs); “Domestic Violence,” (two SCCs), “Love of Secular Values,” “Poor Leadership” and “Sexual Abuse.” In the Catholic Church in Uganda: “Adultery,” Cohabitation,” “Dual Worship (God and material things),” “Lack of Commitment to the Faith and Catholic Church;” “Low Reception of Sacrament of Matrimony” and “Mass Exodus of Youth from the Catholic Church.”

The concluding “Message” from the facilitators to Archbishop Emmanuel Obbo stated:

Observations and appreciations

- The warmth and commitment of Archbishop Emmanuel Obbo to the building of SCCs for grassroots evangelization.
- The neighborhood BCCs that have been popularly considered SCCs can be described as prayer groups or activity based groups.
- The availability of the infrastructure provided by existing BCCs is important for building parish-based SCCs in the dioceses as the “Church in the Neighborhood.”
- The commitment of the workshop participants (priests, catechists and youth) to the building of parish-based SCCs in their dioceses.
- Issues of finances are distinct aspects of BCCs (SCCs).

Recommendations

- Establish SCCs coordinating teams (diocese and parish levels) to manage the growth of parish-based SCCs.⁴⁹⁶
- Establish SCCs Training Teams to nourish and sustain the building of parish-based SCCs.
- Encourage the different lay ecclesial ministries of Pastoral Companions in the SCCs. Sometimes the whole SCC (all the SCC members) are the companions especially in preparing people for the sacraments.
- Prioritise the establishment of Youth SCCs (YSCCs) and youth involvement in the coordination teams and in the training teams.

⁴⁹⁵ Following our usual plan the facilitators arrived two days early to visit an outstation and an SCC to experience the local pastoral reality. During a Sunday Mass at the outstation we baptized 27 babies. During the baptismal ceremony the local people sang a perfect song for the occasion translated as “Brothers and Sisters, Come to Jesus. You Will be Born Again.”

⁴⁹⁶ This priority came out in the group discussion during the workshop. The Pastor of Busia Parish said that he did not have the time to visit and animate all 52 SCCs in his parish. But working with and through the SCC lay animators and coordinators he can network and plan with everyone.

- Emphasize the involvement of SCC members in the social media and the internet especially to attract youth.
- Arrange training for the pastoral coordinators on SCCs.
- Discuss and debate how to find a proper method to handle finances in the SCCs.

Prioritized action points by the participants

- To RESTRUCTURE the existing Small Christian Communities in Tororo Archdiocese.
- To introduce the WORD OF GOD (*Bible Sharing*) in the Small Christian Community meetings.
- To introduce the WORD OF GOD and SCCs Masses in Jinja Diocese.

Other follow-up recommendations of the SCCs Workshop included:

- A scholarship has been awarded to three leaders (priest, catechist, young person) in Tororo Archdiocese to the September, 2015 Lumko SCCs Course in Nairobi, Kenya.
- Produce a *Small Christian Communities Training Handbook* (with Facilitators Guide) in both print and electronic formats in the next year.

The number of SCCs continue to expand especially in the wide variety of specialized small groups. A recent example is small groups that welcome children with special needs such as autism and Down Syndrome.⁴⁹⁷

Fourteen delegates from six African countries (Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Togo and Zambia) and from Bolivia and Germany participated in a “Planning Workshop on Networking among Small Christian Communities (SCCs)/Base Christian Communities (BCCs) in Africa” in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso from 6 to 9 August, 2015. The three member AMECEA delegation was Father Febian Pikiti, the Director of the Pastoral Department of AMECEA and Father Joseph Healey, MM and Mrs. Rose Musimba, members of the AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team. They were joined by 15 grassroots representatives of BCCs in the host country. The workshop was organized by the SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) Commission of Evangelization in association with Missio, Aachen, Germany.

In his “Opening Address” Cardinal Philippe Ouédraogo, the Archbishop of Ouagadougou, emphasized the significance of small Base Christian Communities in Africa in relation to the 2015-2016 worldwide Year of Mercy in the Catholic Church and the continent-wide 2015-2016 African Year of Reconciliation (ATR). He said that African BCCs combine the pastoral experience of the apostolic church in the 1st Century and the values of African culture in the 20th and 21st centuries. BCCs play an important role in the growth of the

⁴⁹⁷ "Is My Child Welcome Here? Four Ways to Reach Parents of Children with Special Needs" by Allen White documents various Christian Church-related small support groups of two types: for the parents themselves and for parents and their special needs children together. SmallGroups.com Website, retrieved 6 December, 2015, <http://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2015/is-my-child-welcome-here.html>

African Church today and promote the theology and practice of the Church as Family of God. He urged the delegates to find concrete ways that SCCs/BCCs can help family and marriage in Africa, adding that at the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October, 2015 “we African Bishops will have something to say.”

The delegates shared their grassroots pastoral experiences of SCCs/BCCs in the Local Churches in Burkina Faso, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eastern Africa (the AMECEA Region of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia), and Togo as well as Bolivia/Latin America and Missio/Germany. The participants experienced the dynamism and energy of this “New Way of Being/Becoming Church” and this “New Pastoral Model of Church” especially in the Global South. It was reported that the host country Burkina Faso has 15 dioceses, 177 parishes with CCBs and a total of 8,162 CCBs (*Communautés Chrétiennes de Base* in French). The nine countries of Eastern Africa have over 180,000 SCCs.

The main “Recommendation for the Way Forward” is summarized as follows:

The consultative meeting that was attended by SECAM and Missio delegates recommended the creation of a SECAM-MISSIO Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Networking Team that will be coordinated by the SECAM Commission of Evangelization. It is supposed to be a small team whose membership will be those pastoral agents who are actively involved in the promotion of this ecclesial model.

The Networking Team will promote information and sharing of experiences about the importance of SCCs in the Local Churches of Africa, reciprocal theological reflection with the Department of Theology of Missio in Germany and interaction with other continental bodies where SCCs are seen as a new way of being church.

New projects include setting up: a SCCs Networking Team Page and Blog on the SECAM Website. A SCCs Networking Library at the SECAM Secretariat in Accra, Ghana (both a physical library and a “virtual” online library). Similar libraries will be set up at the AMECEA Secretariat in Nairobi, Kenya.

Highlights of the SCCs Workshop included:

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

- Small Christian Communities Mass. To celebrate the continent-wide 2015-2016 African Year of Reconciliation (AYR) the theme was “Reconciliation and Peace” using the Eucharistic Prayer of Reconciliation. Participants danced into the church singing *Kweli Kweli ni Baraka Kutoka kwa Mungu* (a Swahili song meaning “Yes Indeed These Are Blessings Coming from God”). The Exchange of Peace was at the end of the Penitential Rite to show that “the community of believers was of one mind and heart” (*Acts of the Apostles* 4:32) before listening to the Word of God. The symbol of peace was from Mende Ethnic Group in Sierra Leone and ethnic groups in South Sudan and Sudan: simultaneously putting one’s right hand on the other person’s left shoulder and saying “peace.”

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

All the participants in the workshop felt support for their involvement in SCCs around the world and expressed both enthusiasm and commitment to march ahead.

The workshop was an opportunity evaluate the “State of SCCs in the Catholic Church on the Continent of Africa.” SCCs (or CCBs in French) are growing stronger and more important in French-speaking Africa. They are strong in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Unfortunately, the important countries of Ghana and Nigeria are lagging behind. Orobator’s assessment is succinct: In these two countries “associations rule.”⁴⁹⁸ Many of the local Catholics are in the traditional Pious Associations/Sodalities/Guilds/Devotional Groups or Societies or Clubs are the main Model of Church in the parish.⁴⁹⁹ They emphasize popular spiritual devotions, prayers, singing, often have a special identity like a uniform and are resistant to new ideas like the SCCs Model of Church that is built on SCCs as small neighborhood parish-based groups. While there are places that have active SCCs like Lagos Archdiocese, in general the Catholic Church in Ghana and Nigeria do not have National Pastoral Plans that emphasize the importance of SCCs.

At the end of the last session each participant gave a final comment, a “last word” in two minutes. I said my final comment would be just one word. I used my favorite word in Swahili *utekelezaji* that means “implementation.” We had many nice discussions during the

⁴⁹⁸ Emmanuel Orobator, conversation with the author, Nairobi, Kenya, 14 August, 2015.

⁴⁹⁹ Some examples: Christian Mothers Association, Daughters of St. Ann, Immaculate Heart of Mary, Knights of the Altar, Knights of St. John, Ladies Auxiliary of St. John, Ladies of Charity, Missionary Association of Mary Immaculate, Sacred Heart of Jesus, Sodality of the Immaculate Conception of Mary, Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Sodality of Our Lady, Sodality of St. Ann, Sodality of St. Peter Claver, St Anna’s Sodality, St. Monica Association and various other associations of Knights and Dames.

workshop, many good suggestions and recommendations, but the key now is a concrete strategy for the follow-up, the way forward, the practical action steps -- step by step. We have to build into our lives “quality time”/”priority time” for this to happen. Sometimes it is helpful and practical to use the journalists' mantra; Who, What, Where, When and How.

The Parish Evangelizing Cells Movement (also called the Parish System of Cells of Evangelization) was founded in South Korea by the Pastor Paul Yonggi Cho with the aim of promoting the spirit of evangelization. This system has flourished in many countries including the United States (Father Michael Eivers⁵⁰⁰ in Florida), Italy (Don Pigi Perini in Milan), Ireland and Australia. Pope Francis greeted an estimated 5,000 members of the Parish Evangelizing Cell Movement in the Blessed Paul VI Hall in the Vatican on 5 September, 2015. The pope stressed four points that are very relevant to SCCs in Eastern Africa:

1. Importance of being a missionary. Above all, this requires listening to the voice of the Holy Spirit who is at the heart of evangelization.
2. How the daily life and work of small communities like the cells help the parish community become a family where “we find the rich and multifaceted reality of the Catholic Church” and where no one is judged.
3. Sharing time together, such as in the home, “is a genuine experience of evangelization that is very similar to what happened in the early days of the Church.”
4. The members of the cells present should make the Eucharist the heart of their mission of evangelization so that each cell [that is, small community] is a Eucharistic Community “where the breaking of the bread is to recognize the real presence of Jesus Christ in our midst.”⁵⁰¹

Despite the danger of civil unrest, delegates from seven dioceses in South Sudan were very brave to participate in a Workshop on “Revitalization of Small Christians Communities (SCCs) as Tools for Grassroots Evangelization in South Sudan” that took place in Juba, South Sudan on 21-22 October 2015. This was the seventh in a series of national and metropolitan SCCs Workshops in the nine AMECEA countries.

The objectives of the workshop that was organized by the AMECEA Pastoral Department in collaboration with Pastoral Department of the Sudan Catholic Bishops Conference (SCBC) were:

1. To share experiences on SCCs in the parishes/dioceses and to learn from one another.
2. To reflect on the role of the different individuals and groups in supporting the growth and development of SCCs in the parishes/dioceses.

⁵⁰⁰ See Michael J. Eivers, “Parish Evangelizing Cells: The Fields Are White With the Promise of Harvest, But Where Can We Find the Reapers?” Carrick Parish Website, retrieved on 8 September, 2015, <http://www.carrickparish.org/cellsFrEivers.htm>

⁵⁰¹ Lydia O’Kane, “Pope Francis Meets with Parish Cell Movement,” News.va Website, retrieved on 7 September, 2015, <http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-francis-meets-with-parish-cell-movement>

3. To enhance networking and collaboration among the Catholic groups, parishes and dioceses in strengthening the growth of SCCs.

During the two-day workshop, the delegates shared their experiences of SCCs in their dioceses and parishes. It was observed that only three out of seven dioceses have made the building of SCCs as part of their pastoral plan. Among the major reasons that were given about this situation are: the long civil war to independence; the current internal conflict; the displacement of people and the lack of skilled pastoral agents in some of the dioceses.

Despite this situation, the delegates in their strategic resolutions and plans expressed their determination to use every situation to make the building of SCCs is a pastoral priority in all the dioceses. When making their work plans the common areas of concern and recommendations were the following:

1. All Diocesan Pastoral Teams to present to the local ordinaries, Bishops and Archbishops, the relevance of considering the building of SCCs as a new way of becoming church so that it is included in the Pastoral Strategic Plans.
2. The Solidarity Pastoral Team of SCBC to intensify the Trainer of Trainers (TOT) Workshops around the Dioceses, offer capacity building to Diocesan Pastoral Teams and use the radio as a means of formation and sharing about SCCs.
3. Involvement of priests as key pastoral agents in the implementation process especially in those dioceses that are starting the building of SCCs.
4. In those dioceses where SCCs have been initiated, to intensify the involvement of the Lay Leaders, Parish Councils and all the laity in sensitization on the importance of SCCs in promoting the pastoral life of the Church.
5. To design plans on emphasizing follow-down through the Diocesan and Parish Pastoral Teams.

The facilitators of the workshop were Father Febian Pikiti Mulenga, AMECEA Pastoral Coordinator and Dr. Alphonse Omolo, a member of the Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team. The twenty-four delegates who participated in the workshop were from the following Archdioceses/Dioceses: Juba (1); Malakal (2); Rumbek (4), Torit (4); Tombura-Yambio (1); Wau (4); Yei (4) and the Pastoral Solidarity Team (4).

In his closing remarks, Father Philip Bingo, the Pastoral Coordinator of SCBC, expressed gratitude to AMECEA Secretariat for the gesture of solidarity and for offering capacity building to the members of the Inter-Diocesan Pastoral Team.

A report from Cynthia Kayla on the Juba, South Sudan Workshop on the SCCs Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/www.smallchristiancommunities.org>) puts our lives in perspective:

The training of Pastoral Coordinators on Small Christian Communities (SCCs) from all the dioceses of South Sudan has begun today 20 October, 2015 in earnest in Juba. In an informal sharing during breakfast, the participant from Yambio Diocese shared a heart-breaking story on how he had to pass through roadblocks mounted by different groups of rebels. At times he had to be taken through bushy paths in order to avoid any harm to his life.

Thank God he got to Juba safely. Hmmm! Makes me wonder how we take peace for granted. Don't we?⁵⁰²

The staff in the Kenya Catholic Secretariat of the KCCB in Nairobi formed four SCCs that meet on the first Monday of the month from 8 to 10:30 a.m.: St. Francis Xavier SCC for national executive secretaries; St. Joseph the Worker SCC for administrative staff and accountants; St. Ignatius Loyola SCC for program officers and project officers; and St. Peter SCC for clergy and religious. Members pray together and discuss common issues.

SCCs in Eastern Africa are deeply involved in the 2015-2016 Jubilee Year of Mercy. Several emails give a good summary:

“Yesterday I spoke with layman Josphat Mulinya, Chairperson of St. Kizito SCC, in Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya about how our SCCs can celebrate the 2016 Jubilee Year of Mercy. We can choose specific “Corporal Works of Mercy:”

- Feed the hungry.
- Give drink to the thirsty.
- Clothe the naked.
- Shelter the homeless
- Visit the sick.
- Visit the imprisoned.
- Bury the dead.

and specific “Spiritual Works of Mercy:”

- Instruct the ignorant.
- Counsel the doubtful.
- Admonish sinners.
- Bear wrongs patiently.
- Forgive offences willingly.
- Comfort the afflicted.
- Pray for the living and the dead.”

“The Gospel for the Third Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C includes *Luke* 4: 18-19.

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord.”⁵⁰³

⁵⁰² See Cynthia Kayla, SCCs Facebook Page, retrieved on 1 November, 2015, https://www.facebook.com/www.smallchristiancommunities.org/posts_to_page

⁵⁰³ This is the same as the Jubilee Year that is described in *Deuteronomy* 15:1-11 and *Leviticus* 25:8-22. This Jubilee text from *Isaiah* 62:1-2 reveals what holiness in action means for Jesus. See footnote on pages 1735-1736 of *The African Bible*, Nairobi: Paulines Africa, 1999.

This is closely connected to *Matthew* 25:34-40:

Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' "The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.'

The *Bible's* teaching that we are to welcome the stranger is one of the most frequently mentioned moral imperatives in both the *Old* and *New Testament*." This core passage of *Matthew* can be rewritten in new contexts and situations today. Pope Francis says "For I was an immigrant and you welcomed me" to reaffirm his commitment to a "church of the peripheries"⁵⁰⁴

This can be described as the "Agenda" and "Action Plan" of Jesus Christ's Public Ministry and Pope Francis' Pontificate as well as our SCCs' involvement in the 2016 Jubilee Year of Mercy. Pope Francis has called and challenged us to perform specific acts of mercy and forgiveness this year. Our research shows that many SCC members do not associate/connect the Gospel phrase "a year acceptable to the Lord" to the 2016 Jubilee Year. Many practice the works of mercy, for example, visiting the sick without naming them or knowing them as such. Very good articles appear in the Catholic Press such as "When I Was in Prison You Visited Me" in the January--February, 2016 issue of *New People* that refer to doing works of charity during the Jubilee Year of Mercy without the corporal works of mercy "branding." Here is where SCC members can bring a new awareness and a new consciousness and make the works of mercy a "conscious way of life."

Here are some comments on our SCC Facebook Page:

- A SCC in Machakos Diocese, Kenya has put this into practice by buying a wheelchair for one of its members who has a disability and cannot walk.

⁵⁰⁴ In his over 15 overseas journeys to date, Francis' concerted insistence for his "open time" has become more than clear, and – surprise, surprise – it's a conspicuous shift: in a nod to what he's repeatedly cited as "the protocol by which we all will be judged," every visit now hinges upon what can be called the "*Matthew* 25 stops," that is, an outreach to some mix of the sick, migrants, prisons, the poor... in a word, "the least brothers/sisters" of whom Jesus said "whatever you did for [them], you did for me." "I examine my conscience with this chapter," Francis told a 2014 audience – "every day." See the blog by Rocco Palmo, "Whispers in the Loggia," retrieved on 19 February, 2016, <http://whispersintheloggia.blogspot.co.ke/2015/11/how-can-i-not-denounce-injustices-you.html>

Francis explains that every night before going to sleep, his last prayer is: During the past day how did I live out/put into practice Jesus' challenge in *Matthew* 25: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

- In most of our SCCs "visiting the sick" is the most common "Corporal Work of Mercy."
- "Bury the dead" and "pray for the living and the dead" are two works that are very important in our SCCs.
- This is what we are doing in the Archdiocese of Lagos, Nigeria.
- As we celebrate the 2016 Jubilee Year of Mercy in our SCCs, let us recall this African parable:

Title: "What is the Most Important Religion?"

Theme: "Love"

Sub Themes: Forgiveness, Mercy, Interreligious Dialog, Leadership, Religion, Wisdom/Stupidity

Author/City/Country: Father Joseph G. Healey, MM with the Christians of Musoma, Tanzania

Genre/Type: Parable

Locale: Musoma, Tanzania

Publication Information: *What Language Does God Speak: African Stories about Christmas and Easter* (St. Paul Publications – Africa, 1989). "African Stories by Season" on the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, <http://www.afriprov.org/african-stories-by-season/12-easter-stories/47-what-is-the-most-important-religion.html>

- As leaders and members of SCCs we have one goal: To convey the love and tenderness of Christ to those who are most in need.

Here is a practical example of how one can unexpectedly experience SCCs as a new way of being church from the grassroots up. On Tuesday, 1 March, 2016 I visited [St. Austin's Parish](#) in Nairobi to discuss with the Parish Priest plans for the marriage of two members of our St. Kizito SCC on Easter Sunday. I discovered that both priests were away for a Recollection Day. So I was able to spend quality time interacting with four members of the parish staff – something I never would have done if I had been immediately ushered into the Parish Priest's Office.

The office secretary gave me the list of the newly elected SCC leaders and we found the name of the newly elected Parish Pastoral Council Secretary (who is from St. Kizito SCC) on our SCC Facebook Page. I helped her to vote on our SCCs Website. I gave copies of our two recommended books for our SCC Course at Tangaza to the Felician Sister working in religious education. I discussed SCCs training programs with the senior catechist and that the most SCCs in Kenya come from his home diocese of Machakos. I discussed the Holy Week liturgies with the sacristan including the outdoor Way of the Cross on Good Friday winding through our different SCCs to finally reach the parish church for the 15th Station. Each person received a bookmark of our SCCs Website. All four were actively involved in coordinating parish activities without the priests being around. I felt the energy of SCCs being involved in pastoral activities.

On 12 April, 2016 we had a one day SCCs Coordinators Workshop on "Finding Pastoral Solutions to the Ongoing Challenges in the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in

Meru Diocese” at the St. Michael Retreat Centre, Meru, Kenya. There were 77 participants from seven deaneries. Special praise for the parish that sent 10 representatives meaning 2,000/= Kenyan Shillings x 10 = 20,000/= (or \$200) raised by the parish. The facilitators were Kenyan diocesan priest Father Lawrence Murori, SCCs Coordinator in Meru Diocese, Kenyan diocesan priest Father Moses Muriira and Father Joseph Healey – all three members of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team.



It was emphasized that as a new model of church SCCs move from being gatherings to authentic small communities of 15 to 20 people. The clear mark of a SCC is Gospel Sharing. This highlights the difference between a SCC and general meetings of Catholics.

The major challenges/obstacles (“vikwazo” in Swahili)/problems by votes:

- Time Management (42 votes):
 - a. Not coming on time to weekly SCC meetings and other activities.
 - b. The facilitator not planning well the time for the various steps of the weekly SCCs meeting (one hour as the norm).
- Lack of men and youth (15 votes).
- Catholic Church leaders (priests and PPC members) do not emphasize the importance of SCCs (15 votes).

Pastoral solutions included: each dedicated SCC member should make a personal commitment to be on time. Start specific Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) in the parish. SCCs should be directly represented on the PPCs. If SCC leaders are members of PPCs they will promote the SCCs pastoral priority.

One of the major obstacles identified by the three facilitators was the very large size of SCCs in Meru Diocese. The number of members of one SCC can be 100 or more Christians. It is significant that the participants in the workshop and other SCCs members that we visited did not see this as a problem. They liked the socializing in the larger SCCs especially through the networking of the extended families (keeping the clans intact) and the additional revenue that came into the SCCs' treasury do to the larger numbers. In the social and cultural analysis chapter of his Master's Thesis -- *Pastoral Solutions to the Obstacles in the Growth of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in St. Massimo Parish, Meru Diocese, Kenya* – Muriira is using the tool of the Problem Tree Analysis (with the corresponding Objective Tree and Solution Tree) to try to come up with a pastoral solution.⁵⁰⁵

A “Critical Incident” was Catechist Samson's report on his visit to a friend in Thika Town in Nairobi Archdiocese. He happened to participate in a Home Mass/House Mass of the Small Christian Community (SCC) of his friend. But this was not really a SCC Mass (*Jumuiya* Mass). The mass was **exactly the same mass** that the priest celebrates in the parish or outstation church. The priest preached and there was very little lay participation. In SCC classes, workshops, meetings and discussions this issue comes up again and again. There is a big difference between a SCC Mass (*Jumuiya* Mass) celebrated in a home or in the neighborhood⁵⁰⁶ and a regular mass celebrated in a home or in the neighborhood.⁵⁰⁷

Another “Critical Incident” was Bishop Salesius Mugambi, Bishop of Meru Diocese's story of clannism among the Meru Catholic people. As an example rather than remain in its particular neighborhood (geographical area) SCC in its parish, a particular Catholic family traveled five kilometers across town to join some relatives in an extended family-type SCC.

⁵⁰⁵ For a Case Study of SCCs in Meru Diocese see “Small Christian Communities in Kenya as the Perfect Base for Charity, Prayer and Mercy” by Moses Murrira Mutai, Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 21 May, 2016, <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/africa/kenya/372-small-christian-communities-in-kenya-as-the-perfect-base-for-charity-prayer-and-mercy.html>

⁵⁰⁶ “Neighborhood” has several meanings. If the living room of the family hosting the SCC Mass (*Jumuiya* Mass) is too small, then the mass takes place in the courtyard or in another nearby outside space/area in the neighborhood. If several SCCs jointly sponsor a SCC Mass (*Jumuiya* Mass) an even larger outside space/area in the neighborhood is used.

⁵⁰⁷ Evans Nyakundi, a SCC leader in Nairobi, gives another striking example. He explains that sometimes a priest says a mass in a home on the Feast Day of the Patron or Patroness Saint of the SCC. Taking over, the priest tried to narrate the history of the patron saint, when in fact, one of the lay SCCs leaders could have explained the history much better. Author's interview with Evans Nyakundi, Nairobi, Kenya, 8 February, 2017.

This has all kinds of problems: favoritism creeps in, the SCC becomes a social rather than a religious group and so on.⁵⁰⁸

As immediate follow-up 100 SCCs leaders participated in a one-day SCCs Workshop in Chuka Parish facilitated by Father Lawrence Murori, now called *Mwanajumuiya Damu Damu*. Also there was a regular meeting of the nine SCCs Deanery Chaplains (similar terminology to youth chaplains) with Bishop Mugambi.⁵⁰⁹ SCCs Masses in the deaneries will begin in September, 2016 with Bishop Mugambi as the main celebrant.

Then 120 SCCs members participated in a one-day SCCs Workshop in Nkubu Parish.



⁵⁰⁸ Author's interview with Salesius Mugambi, Meru, Kenya, 14 April, 2016.

⁵⁰⁹ See the "Minutes of the Meru Diocese Small Christian Communities Deanery Chaplains Meeting on 21 April, 2016 in the Parlor."



It is hoped that Small Christian Communities can be the theme of one of the future Clergy Meetings in Meru Diocese. It could include Muriira's report in the findings of his thesis and a talk on "Five Reasons Why the SCCs Model of Church Changes the Way that Priests do Pastoral Ministry for the Better."

Right now Meru Diocese has a lot of energy and creativity in developing its SCCs Pastoral Plan. One of the SCCs Classes at Tangaza University College in January, 2017 presented this "Case Study of the Meru Diocese SCCs Pastoral Plan:"

1. "Short History of Meru Diocese" by Mwanajumuiya Padri Father Moses Muriira.
2. "Role of the SCCs Coordinator in Meru Diocese" by Mwanajumuiya Padri Lawrence Murori.
3. "Involvement in SCCs from the Experience of a Pastor/Assistant Pastor" by Mwanajumuiya Padri Father Moses Muriira.

In the 1990s Meru Diocese had its own Lumko Course, but then there was a long dry period when many priests did not emphasize this SCC Model of Church. The main reason was that there was no diocesan coordination and animation. Also the local bishop did not emphasize the importance of SCCs and this attitude filtered down to the priests. 20 years later in 2014 a big change occurred when the new bishop appointed a Kenyan priest as the diocesan SCC coordinator. He is very active in organizing SCCs workshops and visiting parishes and encouraging the priests. Also during his canonical visitations the bishop showed interest in the SCCs and asked how they are doing in the parish. This interest filtered down to the priests.

One parish priest had not been sending lay delegates to the bi-annual SCCs Workshops. But see the new interest, he didn't want to be left behind so began sending delegates for formation and training.

In a wide ranging interview/conversation on 25 April 2016 French Little Brother of the Gospel Alain Ragueneau presented a sociological and demographic picture of the 30 SCCs in St. Joseph the Worker Parish, Kangemi, Nairobi, Kenya. Highlights:

- He emphasized that the first priority is in depth, quality formation of SCCs leaders and members. An occasional workshop or seminar is not enough. The New Religious Movements have better formation programs for their lay members, for example, Leadership Training, and Bible Study/Faith Formation, than what is offered to Catholic lay people in parishes and dioceses such as SCC Leaders. The Zaidi Centre for Ignatian Spirituality, started in July, 2000 in Nairobi as a means of ministering to Christians through workshops, presentations, recollections and retreats on aspects of our Christian life offers excellent formation and pastoral accompaniment programs for parishes such as *Retreat in Life*.
- Without good leaders to animate the weekly *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection*, the SCCs can end up as rosary prayer groups and vehicles for fund raising.
- He sees new patterns in why Catholics are not sacramentalizing their marriages in Kenya. A growing factor is that people do not want to make permanent, lifetime commitments. Both men and women feel that they do not “need” to be officially married in the Catholic Church. There seems to be a lack of trust between the partners and a concern over the side effects (“baggage”) of getting married.
- Training programs are necessary for better marriage preparation and accompanying newly married couples.

During a visit to the United States in Summer, 2016, I discovered a lot of interest in a wide variety of small groups of different kinds, and for different reasons. While not yet in the “mainstream” of Catholic life in the USA, Small Faith-sharing Groups are growing in importance. Four patterns:

1. Peer group Small Faith-sharing Groups. Committed Catholics want to share together with their own age group and with their own particular interests. This follows the principle of “like to like.” Some examples:
 - a. Teenagers.
 - b. College students.

Catholic college students tend to drift away from their Catholic faith during their college years when they are on their own. Some of these students say they have to find their own way, their own path in life. Just inheriting the Catholic faith from their parents and grandparents is not enough. They have to find their own faith and live their own values in their own social, cultural and religious context, for example, contemporary USA.

Some are nourished and strengthened by sharing their faith in a small,

compatible group of peers. These SCCs are increasingly important in college campus ministry programs. American Jesuit priest Thomas Rausch, SJ states:

It is extremely important to develop the various kinds of outreaches to connect with these Catholic young people [on colleges campuses], programs that orient them to their faith, Small Faith-sharing Groups where they have a chance to share their faith with others and really get in touch with, and process, some of those questions that are so important.⁵¹⁰

A survey of campus ministry programs in many universities and colleges indicates that one campus minister on the staff is responsible for animating, promoting and coordinating small communities of different kinds.

- c. Young adults (after college graduation between 21 and 35).
2. A major challenge is the transition from college graduation to active participation in parishes and Catholic life including involvement in SCCs of young adult Catholics in many different forms, but are very elusive:⁵¹¹
- i. Young Adult SCC in a specific parish.
 - ii. Young Professionals (YPs) SCC in a specific parish.
 - iii. Alumni SCC of a particular college across parish lines.
 - iv. Young Professionals (YPs) SCC across parish lines.
 - v. Online Young Adult SCC (using special media such as Facebook, What'sApp, Skype)
- d. LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer). In some instances, heterosexual people join these groups to create a greater and richer diversity.
 - e. People following a particular charism. Third Order Carmelites.
 - f. Social justice and peace. Small groups connected to programs such as JustFaith are very committed.
 - h. Parish-based SCCs on many levels. There are many types of small groups in parishes in the USA, but relatively few SCCs as such.

⁵¹⁰ Thomas Rausch, "Being Catholic in a Culture of Choice: Catholic Campus Ministry and Today's Student," *A Faith That is Known and Lived: A Conference on Catholic Campus Ministry and Its Future*, Washington, DC: FADICA, 2007, p. 11.

⁵¹¹ As an amusing aside, CARA at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA conducted research on how to invite young adults to participate in Small Faith Communities in the United States. One respondent said: "If I had this answer I would be the most famous person in the world."

At the same time, more research has indicated some of the various reasons why Catholics do not want to participate in small Faith-sharing communities or groups. American Sister Mary Joseph Schultz, SCC answered in one word “fear.”⁵¹² While parish-based SCCs are the ideal, many people do not want to share their personal lives, especially their weaknesses and vulnerability and their winding, up and down Christian journey with others – many whom they may not know well. They do not want to reveal themselves and their uncertainties and struggles. A *Bible* Study Group, yes. A Book Club, yes. But not a regular gathering/forum that includes sharing about one’s doubts, loneliness, divorce, sexuality, financial challenges, addictions of different kinds, etc.

American laywoman Pam Spellman emphasizes that parish-based Small Faith-sharing Groups need to grow and develop an identity, a bonding over a period of time. This needs a consistency in the membership and in the participation. Small groups that have new members and new sign-ups each semester or liturgical season have more trouble bonding and developing a rapport that gradually allows sharing on a deeper level. Some members even drop out if the sharing becomes too personal.⁵¹³

Alphonse Omolo who has had wide experience animating SCCs in England, Germany, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and USA says that it takes a long time to develop successful small Faith-sharing communities. At the beginning members can have different expectations – a prayer group, *Bible* Study, a social club, group counseling, even therapeutic sessions. They have to slowly create a safe place for sharing and build up the trust level. He started a SCC in a parish in London, England and it was slow going. The participants did not want to share their personal lives and their struggles. They said, “my life is private.” Eventually they bonded.⁵¹⁴

3. An important component of Parish Renewal Programs:

There are a number of Catholics who have renewal, conversion and transformation experiences in a wide variety of renewal programs in retreats, spiritual weekends, pilgrimages, etc. that integrate Small Faith-sharing Groups. Participants are enriched by sharing their spiritual journeys, experiences and questions. Then they want to continue in ongoing small groups as part of their spiritual life.

Peter Feuerherd writes:

For many years [RENEW International](#) has promoted a reliance on small groups to galvanize parish life. RENEW is based largely on Vatican II theology. It grew out of renewal movements popular with Catholics in the 1970s with the intent of bringing that energy into parish life via Small Faith-sharing Groups. The idea, popular in Latin America, is that by

⁵¹² Author’s conversation with Mary Joseph Schultz, New Vernon, New Jersey, 17 July, 2016.

⁵¹³ Author’s conversation with Pam Spellman, New Vernon, New Jersey, 18 July, 2016.

⁵¹⁴ Author’s conversation on Skype with Alphonse Omolo, 17 July, 2016 and in person, Nairobi, Kenya, 12 May, 2017.

bringing Catholics together in small groups to reflect upon the Scriptures, parishes will be transformed.⁵¹⁵

4. Part of a reflection process in SCCs using modules of four to five weeks based on current themes and topics such as a recent encyclical such as *Laudato Si* and the 2016 Year of Mercy.

Specifically, we are preparing an “Encounter of College Students Involved in Small Christian Communities” to take place in late July--early August, 2017 at Manhattan College Riverdale, New York, USA. The 110 participants will include three three-member teams (delegations) from Africa: Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya; Lusaka, Zambia; and the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS) – Pax Romana -- (Nairobi, Kenya; Benin; Paris, France). The “Background Note” to the meeting states:

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is the “umbrella” term/overall term used in this Encounter and is the most common expression for this new way of being or becoming church/new pastoral model of church in many parts of the world. Different terms are used in English in different places. BCC means “Basic Christian Community” and BEC means “Base [Basic] Ecclesial Community” and is sometimes written “Ecclesial Base [Basic] Community.” A variety of names are used in the USA. In some parishes and colleges/universities in the USA the specific name “Small Christian Communities” is not known or used, that is, it has very little “Name Recognition.” People would more immediately recognize “Small Groups” or “Small Prayer Groups” or “Small Church Communities” or “Small Faith Communities” or “Small Faith-sharing Communities” or “Small Bible Study Groups” or “Campus RENEW Groups” or “Christian Life Communities (CLCs).”

The challenge is to create a successful “branding”⁵¹⁶ of the name, identity and meaning of Small Christian Communities. “Communities” is deeper and more focused than the generic “groups” that can cover everything. “Christian” helps to give the SCC members a specific identity. In their weekly meetings SCC members emphasize both the values of Faith-sharing and *Bible* reflection. A combined version is lectionary-based Faith-sharing.

The SCCs courses at various theological institutions in Nairobi are revised and updated each year according to the local context and reading “the signs of the times.” This includes both the content of the courses and the teaching methods (websites, free online ebook, Powerpoint Presentation).

⁵¹⁵ Peter Feuerherd, “Parish Renewal Groups Teach Lessons from Megachurches,” National Catholic Reporter (NCR), 7 July, 2016, NCR Website, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/parish-renewal-groups-teach-lessons-megachurches>

⁵¹⁶ Successful examples are the Oilers SCC in Denver, Colorado and Shekein SCC in South Bend, Indiana.



Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team Team Teaching in the SCCs Course at Hekima College in Nairobi, Kenya.



Alphonse Omolo and Joe Healey of the Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team Teaching in the SCCs Course at Tangaza College in Nairobi, Kenya.

Extensive research has identified these 13 common and reoccurring major obstacles/barriers/challenges (*vikwazo* in Swahili) in the growth of SCCs in Eastern Africa.

- Time Management: Two issues:
 1. Not coming on time to weekly SCC meetings and other activities.
 2. The facilitator not planning well the time for the various steps of the weekly SCCs meeting (one hour as the norm).
- Poor and inconsistent leadership.
- Poor and inconsistent attendance.
- Lack of men.
- Lack of youth.
- Members talk about money too much. This can turn the SCC into a fund raising group and people drop out of the SCC.
- Catholic Church leaders (priests and PPC members) do not emphasize the importance of SCCs.
- SCCs are too large (sometimes members of one SCC can be 100 or more) and there is a reluctance to divide them into smaller SCCs.

- Difficulty in understanding the difference between a SCC and a Small Apostolic Group/Traditional Parish Organization or Association in the parish.
- Tribalism and discrimination.
- During the *Bible* sharing/reflection some members tend to preach rather than share.
- Lack of a basic understanding of the meaning and purpose of SCCs.
- Few personal *Bibles* in individual homes.

Our ongoing research focuses on how many dioceses in Eastern Africa have SCCs Coordinators. Italian Consolata Bishop Pante Virgilio of Maralal Diocese reports that Kenyan layman Peter Kemuyieo Lenssuda is the SCCs Coordinator of Maralal, Kenya and that “his efforts has brought productivity and he has worked tirelessly to reach out far and beyond.”

Peter describes the SCCs Pastoral Priority in Maralal Diocese as follows:

1. Restructure the existing SCCs in our diocese.
2. Prioritize the establishment of Youth SCCs.
3. Introduce the Word of God and SCC Masses in our diocese.
4. Emphasize forgiveness in our SCCs because SCCs are the “Church in the Neighborhood.” Staying at peace with each other will curb out cattle rustling.
5. Implore the parish priests to participate in SCCs meetings so as to know and give guidance as necessary.

These SCCs pastoral priorities set a good example for all the dioceses in Kenya.

One ongoing discussion and research in the AMECEA Region is about the best structures to promote SCCs on the regional, national, diocesan, parish, sub-parish and outstation levels. Proposals that cover coordination, formation and training and networking include:

1. SCCs Offices.
2. SCCs Desks. The AMECEA Pastoral Department, “Phase One -- AMECEA Pastoral Department Action Plan 2015-2018” in “Implementation of AMECEA Strategic Pastoral Plan 2014-2024.” Goal 1: “Promote New and Deeper Evangelization” under “Strategies” states: “Create SCC Desks and Operation Structures at National Conference and Diocesan Levels.” One model is the Family Life Desk in the National Catholic Secretariat of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB). One challenge in Kenya is that parish-based SCCs are under the Pastoral Department while school-based SCCs like YSCCs are under the Education Department.
3. Mobile SCCs Training Teams. Described in other places in the Ebook.
4. Online SCCs Networking Teams including online activities such as *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection*.

Crucial issues are personnel, transportation, network connectivity and finance.

From Thursday, 4 May, 2017 to Saturday, 6 May, 2017 we had a Workshop on “Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Today” for priests and lay leaders in Kakamega Diocese, Kenya. The objective of the workshop was to revitalize and reenergize SCCs as a

means of evangelizing and pastoral development. It took place at the Bishop Stam Pastoral Center, Kakamega. We launched the 80-page booklet *Strengthening the Growth of Small Christian Communities in Africa -- A Training Handbook for Facilitators* edited by Emmanuel Chimombo, Joseph G. Healey, Rita Ishengoma, Rose Musimba, Febian P. Mulenga and Alphonse C. L. Omolo, Nairobi: AMECEA Pastoral Department, 2017. This SCCs Workshop was facilitated by the AMECEA Team, specifically the AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team.

It was mentioned that at the AMECEA Plenary Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya in July, 2011, Cardinal Polycarp Pengo, Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, pointed out that one of the drawbacks for the solidarity of the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa is that many Catholics on the grassroots do not easily see the link between AMECEA (that comes across as a big organization of Catholic bishops at the top) and the SCCs on the local level. He said: "In five years to come, I would like that AMECEA gets known to the faithful and that they realize it is their responsibility, and not just an institution of the bishops." *Seed 23: 8-9* (August-September 2011), p. 9. SCCs are a special concrete way on the local level for this to happen.

From Monday, 8 May, 2017 to Thursday, 11 May, 2017 we had a Workshop on "Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Today" for priests in Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya. It was part of a series of on-going formation programs for priests. There were 36 participants including Kenyan Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth, the Archbishop of Kisumu Archdiocese who officially opened the workshop. The objective of this workshop was to reenergize SCCs as a means of evangelizing and to bring back the communal vibrancy of our faith within the neighborhoods. It took place at the Ukweli Pastoral Center in Kisumu.

One talk at the workshop was on "Lay Ecclesial Ministries in Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa." Over the years the lay ecclesial ministries in SCCs in Eastern Africa have evolved in responding to the contemporary signs of the times. After Vatican II for many years in the Catholic Church there has been a lively debate about the use and meaning of the word "ministry." Certain people did not want to use the name "minister" for a lay person, but it is more widely accepted now. The popular usage today includes the legitimacy and importance of non-ordained lay ecclesial ministries officially recognized by the Catholic Church. In some cases there is an official installation or induction.

There are various leadership models, types and styles of lay ecclesial ministry. In the spirit of being a new way of being and becoming church, the emphasis is on service rather than authority, especially servant leadership. A lay ecclesial minister is a servant of the servants. A lay minister is not a boss. There are two distinct roles. Sometimes this lay ministry is to animate, facilitate and coordinate activities within the SCC. Sometimes this lay ministry represents the SCC at the outstation, sub-parish and parish levels.

Two major paradigm shifts have occurred in the Catholic Church. First, SCC members (the great majority are laymen and lay women) are now pastoral agents of evangelization and pastoral ministry (real "subjects" and not just the "objects" as in the past). We are emphasizing the official name "lay ecclesial ministry" for the leaders in the SCCs and at the higher levels. Second, SCCs in the neighborhoods are themselves are the place (or *locus*) of evangelization and pastoral ministry.

So in Kisumu Archdiocese we are trying to introduce the official name of "lay ecclesial ministries" for the different offices or services or leadership roles in the SCCs and on the outstation, sub-parish, parish and archdiocesan levels.

St. Boniface Catholic Church, Aluor Parish, Gem in Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya offers an interesting Case Study of one new way that the SCC is the actual physical “place” of evangelization and pastoral ministry. The parish priest Kenyan Father Anthony Futah explains how his pastoral visitation program involves using a “Mobile Office.” The parish has 75 SCCs. Every week from Tuesday to Friday he visits one specific SCC for a whole day. He brings his office files and registers SCC members for baptism, confirmation, marriage, etc. He does pastoral counseling and discusses various pastoral cases in the SCC. There is time for the celebration of the Sacrament of Reconciliation and the day concludes with Mass.

During the SCCs Workshop in Kisumu, Kenya I presented a “critical incident” of what I call “‘We haven’t been told yet’ lay Catholics.” On Saturday, 25 February, 2017, the day of the National Launch of the 2017 Kenyan Lenten Campaign in Nairobi, Kenya, in Consolata Shrine parking lot in Westlands, Nairobi I met around 20 dedicated, committed lay Catholics (including catechists and SCC leaders) of Kisumu Archdiocese who had traveled overnight from Kisumu to Nairobi in two minivans. I asked them when the campaign would be launched in Kisumu. They answered: “We haven’t been told yet,” that is, the priests hadn’t told them yet the timetable for the launch and the training program in Kisumu Archdiocese itself. Ideally this would have been several weeks before since the Lenten booklets arrived early in all the dioceses. This story makes me very sad. Here was the old model of church: Hierarchical, clerical, top down. The lay people waiting to be told, rather than taking the pastoral and social initiatives themselves.

I shared Pope Francis’ challenging teaching that dramatic changes are occurring in the Catholic Church worldwide – a shift from the traditional pyramid model (with the popes, bishops and priests at the top and the lay people at the bottom) to the inverted pyramid model of church: *The Tablet* (7 January, 2017) states:

Pope Francis' reforms should not be seen as personal projects, but a continuation and revitalization of the reform movement that began with the Second Vatican Council. The Catholic Church, Francis explains, is an inverted pyramid, with the People of God at the top and its priests and bishops, including the pope, below: a church that sees leadership as service, that engages in a dialog with the world and offers it the medicine of mercy.

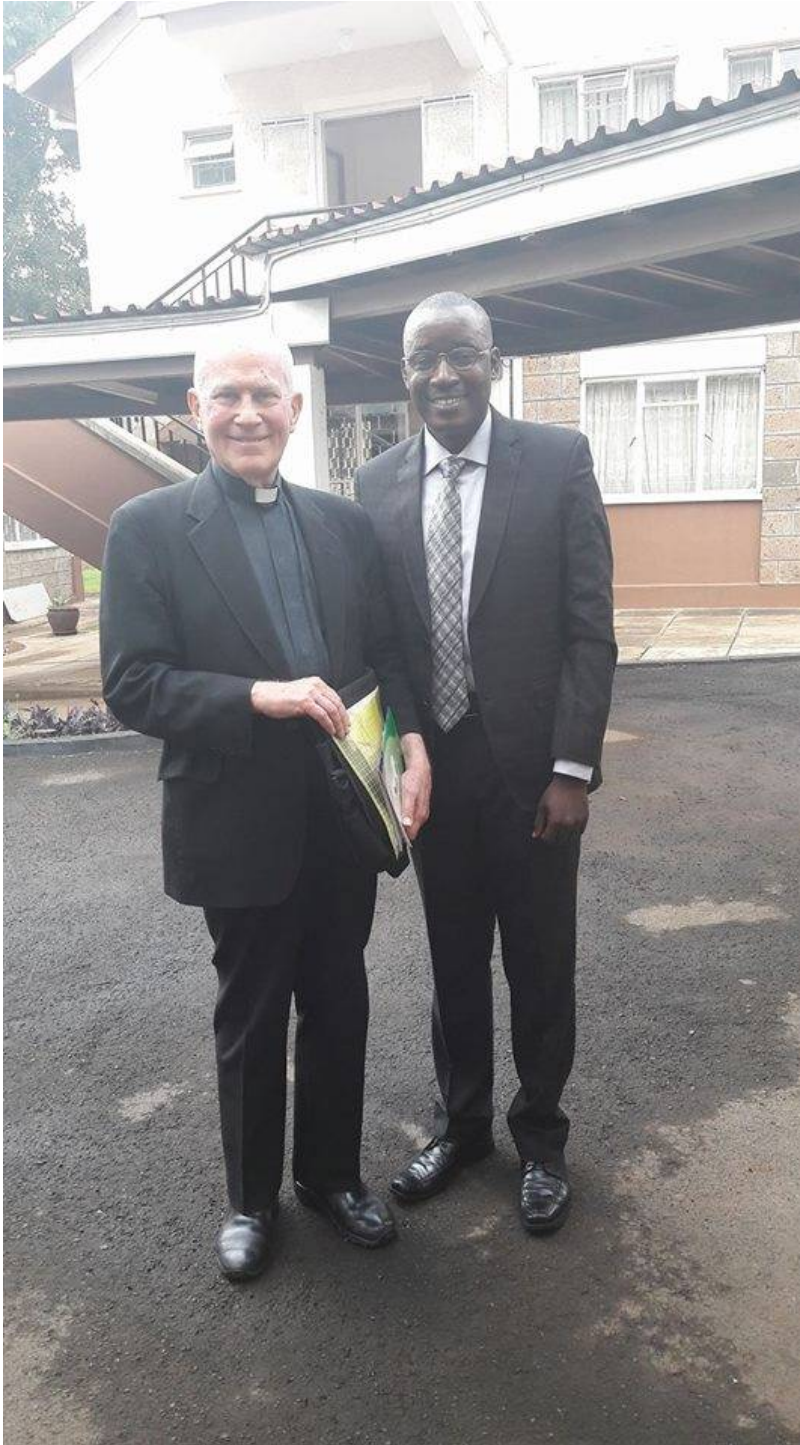
In closing the workshop Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth, the Archbishop of Kisumu Archdiocese, emphasized the importance of the pastoral plan of the archdiocese saying: “SCCs are a new way of life in Kisumu Archdiocese today. This means introducing new ways in our pastoral work.” He particularly praised the SCCs for being a source of vocations to the priesthood and religious life and nurturing these vocations.

Our new book

Chimombo, Emmanuel, Joseph G. Healey, Rita Ishengoma, Rose Musimba, Febian P. Mulenga and Alphonse C. L. Omolo, (eds.), *Strengthening the Growth of Small Christian Communities in Africa -- A Training Handbook for Facilitators*, Nairobi: AMECEA Pastoral Department and Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2017.

was launched at the Meeting of the AMECEA Executive Board at the AMECEA Secretariat on Friday, 19 May 2017. Two key points:

1. There should be editions in other languages such as Swahili (East and Central Africa and Chewa (Malawi).
2. Within the Mother (or *Mama*) SCC there can be Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) and Children Small Christian Communities (CSCCs) that are like PMC SCCs.



Alphonse C. L. Omolo and Joe Healey presented the *SCCs Facilitators Handbook* at the Meeting of the AMECEA Executive Board at the AMECEA Secretariat on Friday, 19 May 2017.

The need for facilitation can be seen in many ways especially in rural parishes. A dramatic example. With a Novena to prepare for the Feast of Pentecost on 4 June, 2017 the SCC members in Our Lady of Consolata Shrine Parish in Westlands, Nairobi were well aware of the importance of this feast and the coming of the Holy Spirit. But in a rural parish

in Kisii Diocese a loyal Catholic couple (a farmer and his wife) participated in their normal SCC meeting on the afternoon of Ascension “Sunday.” Following the plan of the SCC, the Gospel of the following Pentecost Sunday (*John 20:19-23*) was read, but with no introduction or explanation. So the couple knew nothing about the overall liturgical plan or that the following Sunday was the second most important day of the Catholic Church year (after Easter Sunday). It was just a regular Sunday.

In our ongoing research we find that for some Catholics “Daily Lectionary-based Faith-sharing” is becoming increasingly important, both individually and in small communities. The reading and shared reflections can be on both on the First Reading and the Gospel or on just the Gospel. It takes different platforms:

1. Daily scripture posts on Small Christian Communities Facebook Page and other related Facebook Pages thanks to Alloys Nyakundi.
2. Some SCCs have WhatsApp Small Communities (preferred to “groups”) where they share daily about the *Bible* and other activities of the SCCs both by audio and video chat and by text.
3. Some SCCs have Skype Small Communities where they share daily about the *Bible* and other activities of the SCCs both by audio and video chat and by text.
4. Email messages and websites like the “Daily Gospel,” “Laudate,”
5. Specific faith-based reflections like the daily “Gospel Reflection from Notre Dame.”
6. Reading and reflecting on the daily homilies of Pope Francis in St. Martha’s Hostel in Rome. He tries to connect the scripture readings to our daily lives.

A relatively new dynamic is Eastern Africans Catholics who move to the USA and then want to continue to participate in some kind of SCC Model of Church just as they experienced back in their home African countries. First, these people want to promote the African values of community, personal relationships and mutual support – in an American society focused on privacy and individualism. Second, Sunday Mass in a large anonymous parish is not enough. So African small communities of many different kinds are springing up in Boston, Massachusetts, Jersey City, New Jersey, Baltimore, Maryland, Dallas, Texas and other places. These include Swahili Masses on Sunday, social events and various forms of SCC networking.

Here is an interesting Case Study that is more than a random anecdote and is really a critical pastoral incident:

Kenyan Bishop Joseph Obanyi was born in the Kisii area of Kenya and later became the Bishop of Kakamega, Kenya. He has a cousin who was a fervent Catholic and a dedicated Small Christian Community (SCC) member in her Kisii Parish. When she moved to New Jersey, USA she seemed overwhelmed by American secularism. She did not receive a good welcome in her new Catholic parish, had no support group and seemed “lost in America.” When Obanyi met her in New Jersey, she had left the Catholic Church and joined an Evangelical Church that was very welcoming and stressed the personal relationships and community building that she was used to enjoy in the SCCs in Kenya. The bishop was shocked. What had happened to her?

The bishop and I agreed: If his cousin had found a Catholic SCC “support group” in New Jersey she would still be an active, practicing Catholic today. So the SCC Model of Church can help to reverse the tide of Catholic “losses” to other Christian denominations in USA? A variety of SCCs (physical and online) can provide welcome, hospitality and a “home” support community to Africans living in the USA. The SCC can provide immediate welcome and hospitality in the local neighborhood and not wait for some distant and more general Parish Hospitality Committee to take action.

As we read and respond to the signs of the times, this message on our SCC Facebook Page is significant:

Raphael Okusaga writes from Lagos, Nigeria: “There will be workshop for all parish SCC leaders and facilitators at Holy Cross Cathedral in Lagos, Nigeria on Saturday, 2 December 2017 beginning at 10 am. We will be discussing child abuses and the roles of SCCs in protecting children in the neighborhood. We want the awareness and reawakening to start from the SCC Centers. This is very important for the Catholic Church in Africa today.”

A person in Kenya replied: “This is an interesting area for discussion and action by the SCC's. We should think of a similar event locally in Kenya.”

Omolo comments:

I find this a very valuable plan by the Catholic Church in Lagos, Nigeria. Considering the fact that we work with many children in our churches in many activities, their protection against violence by the adults working closely with them and against violation from fellow children and a child protection policy should be a matter of priority in every parish and its grassroots structures. It is very encouraging to give valuable attention to the SCCs since there is great opportunity to spread this to all sections of our society. Child Protection is my professional practice so the idea of integrating child protection measures in the SCCs gives me great joy and encouragement. It is something we should have started decades ago. This is a major encouragement to the Catholic Church in Africa and I am hopeful that we all can implement measures to protect children in our churches and communities.⁵¹⁷

The St. Charles Lwanga Swahili Community in St. Alphonsus Parish, Archdiocese of Saint Paul and Minneapolis⁵¹⁸, Minnesota, USA offers an interesting Case Study of responding to the signs of the times. The community was started in 2010 by Kenyan Catholics who wanted to continue in the USA the SCCs experience of church that they enjoyed and appreciated growing up in Kenya. These African Catholics who had immigrated to the USA wanted to continue to live their community values (religious and social) from

⁵¹⁷ Alphonse Omolo, email message to the author, 5 November, 2017.

⁵¹⁸ Based on conversations with Geoffrey Korir, Loice Sigei, Margaret Nyoike and Stella Nduta in Minnesota from 23 to 29 May, 2018.

their African homelands. St. Alphonsus Parish has provided a home for these Swahili-speaking Kenyan Catholics to foster unity and community.

The community of perhaps 150 people of different ethnic groups in Kenya now has a monthly mass in Swahili in St. Alphonsus Parish sometimes followed by a meal and six geographical SCCs (Saints Francis of Assisi, Joseph the Worker, Kizito, Our Lady of Fatima, Teresa of Calcutta and Vincent) that meet monthly in their homes for prayer, Rosary and Gospel reflection (either the Gospel of the previous or following Sunday). One SCC animates the monthly community mass. Active WhatsApp groups (both the whole community and of each SCC) and an Email Mailing List connects all the members. The community provides support for children's education, baptisms, weddings, baby showers and funerals. The community has a Benevolent Fund with a Bank Account to provide financial support for members who have lost loved ones. There is a Coordinating Committee of the Chairperson, Secretary and the Leaders of the six SCCs. Presently By-laws are being written of the St. Charles Lwanga Swahili Community. There are seven men and three women on the Drafting Committee.

There is an active Women's SCC that meets one Saturday a month, the day before the Swahili Mass in the homes of members: for prayer, songs, the Rosary and *Bible* Sharing (one woman reads her favorite *Bible* Passage and reflects on its meaning in her life). The SCC has two retreats a year. The community has a Men's SCC that meets for occasionally for social and fundraising activities.

Like all SCCs, St. Charles Lwanga Swahili Community has growing pains and continues to face new challenges as it creates the path by walking. The present leadership struggles to keep the focus on the basic meaning and practice of SCCs and not be hijacked by other priorities such as:

- Money, fund raising and self-help projects.
- Envisioning the SCC as a NGO.
- Social activities such as events connected to the marriages of SCCs members.
- Devotional practices that divert the SCC from focus on the *Bible*.

A SCC workshop took place on 27 May, 2018 on "Growing St. Charles Lwanga Swahili Community in St. Alphonsus Parish." The three facilitators responded to the answers of participants to the question: "Give a burning challenge for the growth of Small Christian Communities in St. Charles Lwanga Swahili Community?" A present challenge is handing over leadership. The general guideline worldwide is that the chairperson can have two terms of three years – a total of six years. Term limits should be observed the health and growth of the SCC. It was pointed out how the abuse of term limits has caused tensions in many African governments and the same problem has occurred in our SCC.

When the St. Charles Lwanga Swahili Community could not agree on new leadership the pastor put pariah-wdie activities on hold. One member wrote: "The interim leadership for our *Jumuiya* that was supposed to be selected this month in Minnesota was not done and instead our *Jumuiya* was put on suspension by Fr. Don until we sort our problems between ourselves first. The small *jumuiya* groups, prayer groups and women groups are still operational except we can't do any activities at the church."

There is a plan to have a future workshop on “The Basic Meaning and Practice of SCCs.”

In June, 2018 I visited a parish in Baltimore Archdiocese, Maryland, USA. I had a very nice conversation with a layman who was on the Parish Coordination Team –responsible for the church properties. He was a very committed Catholic. He explained that he grew up Jewish, but converted to the Catholic Faith when he married his Catholic wife. When I asked him my favorite question – Do you read the Gospel before going into church on Sunday morning? – he answered, “No, but it is a good idea.” He explained that the Parish Coordination Team does not read the scripture before having its regular meetings – a pastoral practice some parish committees follow. The parish has SCCs that meet weekly, but this layman is too busy to join one. He said that at the annual Staff Retreat in January, 2018, his resolution was to start reading the Gospel of the following Sunday, but now it was June, 2018 and he hadn’t started yet. Some many good Catholics are like this person: good intentions in reading the *Bible*, but not making it a priority and a regular commitment.

I visited the Los Angeles, California area in the first half of July, 2018. When I asked American Deacon Fred Rose of [American Martyrs Parish](#) in Manhattan Beach if there are Small Christian Communities, he commented, “nothing is small in California.”⁵¹⁹ But this parish and other parishes in Los Angeles have many kinds of active small groups.

One small group in the parish is called “Sunday Readings in Context” that meets every Wednesday from 7:30—9 p.m. Ideally the Sunday readings should be read and reflected on in the context of the lectionary cycle and the liturgical season. For example, the five 17th to 21st Sundays in Ordinary Time, Year B (29 July, 2018 to 26 August, 2018) use consecutive readings from John 6 about Jesus’ teaching on the Eucharist (the miracle of the loaves/the bread of life). They should be understood as a unit.

Context is a very important term in growing⁵²⁰ SCCs. One of the five choices in the every two months Poll on the SCCs Website for July-August, 2018 is “Adapts to the local context.”

While the *Bible* is used in different small groups in these parishes, emphasis on being lectionary-based Catholics especially using the Gospel of the following Sunday is very rare. When I presented our research that 95% of American Catholics do not read the Gospel before going into church on Sunday morning, one Catholic layperson said, “That figure is low. It is more like 98%.”

A striking exception is [St. Martin de Porres Catholic Church](#) in Yorba Linda, Orange Diocese, California, USA that has 26 active SCCs led by well-trained facilitators. It is a very good example of “best practices” in parishes in the USA. The only feature missing is growing successful Young Adult Small Christian Communities (YASCCS). These specific small communities come and go based on the active Catholic young adults in the parish at a particular time. These YASCCS are hard to sustain on a permanent basis.

⁵¹⁹ Fred Rose, conversation with the author, Manhattan Beach, California, 1 July, 2018.

⁵²⁰ The term “growing,” originally popularized by Evangelical Churches to describe their missionary expansion, is now common in Catholic circles to describe multiplying SCCs.

Over many years this parish tried different spiritual and pastoral renewal programs such as RENEW, Disciples in Mission and Generations of Faith that focus on the small groups model. But these programs were introduced from the outside, for example, from the Pastoral Center of Orange Diocese, and never fully owned by the local Catholic parishioners. So, the small groups slowly fizzled out after the renewal programs were over. In 2010 a committed SCCs core team within the parish designed and proposed a new Small Christian Communities ministry from the grassroots up to Catholics in the parish who want something more than just Sunday Mass and who are interested in growing deeper in their faith and community. The invitation on the parish website states:

This ministry is made up of over 300 parishioners, who have a desire to understand more about our faith, how it affects our daily life, and all aspects of Christian Community Life. We meet to break open the readings of the upcoming Sunday and prepare ourselves to embrace them at Mass. We meet in groups of 10 --12 people, in one's home, weekly or bi-weekly. Meetings, including social time, last about two hours. Friendships develop that last a lifetime. If our Lord is calling you to spread your wings and move closer to him, consider SCC your path to achieving this goal.⁵²¹

A key is flexibility. A parishioner in St. Martin de Porres can join a SCC in one of the seven geographical zones in the parish (very important because of the long driving time in California) or a special interest/shared interest small community such as (listed alphabetically): divorced/widows, empty nesters, moms-of-toddlers, newly married couples, young adults and seniors. "A SCC is intended to be a small church, providing not just Faith-sharing discussion, but a group of friends who support each other, pray together, study their faith and reach out to others in need. The important thing is that the group functions as a spiritual unit, much like a family."⁵²² Presently the SCCs use the commentary in the biblical resource *Insights*.

Mark Jablonski, one of the SCCs Core Team Facilitators, states:

In the eight years we have been in our SCC my wife Kris and I have come to experience a new source of strength and comfort in our lives. Our SCC has taught us how much we value our parish community and the support they provide us. We have come to appreciate our meetings as a time when we can slow down, breathe in God's spirit and share how the gospel applies to our lives. When we come together as "big church" each Sunday at mass, the experience is even more personal and intimate because of the time we have taken in reflecting on the readings. As one of our members has said, SCCs are "soup of the soul."⁵²³

⁵²¹ Small Christian Communities, [St. Martin de Porres Catholic Church](https://smdpyl.org/small-christian-communities) Website, retrieved on 22 July, 2018, <https://smdpyl.org/small-christian-communities>

⁵²² "Overview" of the *Small Christian Communities Facilitator's Guide*, Yorba Linda, California: privately printed, 2017.

⁵²³ Mark Jablonski, "Pulpit Appeal -- Talk on SCCs" at St. Martin de Porres Parish masses, 2018.

Altogether there are 62 ministries in the parish including (listed alphabetically): bereavement (Grief Support), Grace Women's Group, Men's Group and [WINGS \(Women IN God's Spirit\)](#).

Our AMECEA SCCs Training Team visited Bishop Linus of Nebbi Diocese, Archbishop John Baptist Odama of Gulu Archdiocese and Sister Lona Cypriani of Palorinyi Refugee Settlement of Arua Diocese, Uganda on Thursday, 9 August, and Friday, 10 August, 2018. Their overall comments on northern Uganda are as follows:

1. Many factors have negatively affected the growth of SCCs in northern Uganda: the long lasting war with Joseph Kony in northern Uganda and the subsequent fight over land; the war in South Sudan and the one and a half million South Sudanese refugees who have flooded into northern Uganda; and the rising influence of the evangelical churches. The SCCs have slowed down and lack trained leaders. The SCCs need to be reinvigorated and reenergized with leadership training the first priority.
2. Providing the Eucharist to the Catholics in the out-station is a challenge. A newer approach is for the catechist to carry the Eucharist to the "Sunday Service Without a Priest" on a motorcycle or a car. Ideally the transportation is provided by the wealthier Catholics in the outstations. Interestingly enough, the women catechists are more effective than the men catechists in various places.
3. Catholic boarding schools should automatically have YSCCs.

Saturday, 1 September, 2018

A "One-day Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Pastoral Solutions Workshop" took place at Immaculate Conception Parish, Mavurunza, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. It was facilitated by Sister Rita Ishengoma, STH and Father Joseph Healey, MM, members of the AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team. In examining the local reality some challenges in Dar es Salaam are:

Unemployed
HIV/AIDS
Fistula
Diabetes
Refugees
IDP

Visiting Dandora Parish in Nairobi, Kenya on Sunday, 16 September, 2018 12 members of the Missio-sponsored Network Small Christian Communities Africa Workshop came up with a new mantra: *We create new paths by walking based on the local context*. I interviewed three Kenyan members of the newly formed Young Adult Small Christian Community (YASCC): a 26-year-old male recent college graduate looking for a job; a 27-year-old female secondary school teacher; and a 29-year-old male baker. After some years in one of the six Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) in the parish, they joined the Young Catholic Adult Community for the 25 to 35-year-old age group. Their needs and interests as young working people is different than for students and younger people. They are excited to grow their faith in a new way with their young adult peers. This reinforces the principle that forming specific peer group Small Christian Communities for each age group is a priority in Africa today.

In light of so many young people leaving the Catholic Church in Africa and worldwide, I asked the young baker why he was at the Catholic Church on Sunday afternoon when he could have been watching a football match on TV or at a bar and or just hanging out with his friends. He said: “For my Catholic Faith I need to be here today.” He felt nourished and inspired by the weekly meeting (that included *Bible* Reflection on the Gospel of the following Sunday) and other activities of his YASCC. He personally has this felt need, while at the same time commenting that his younger brother sadly does not go to church anymore.

In various discussions Mwanajumuiya Alphonse Omolo has pointed out the key distinction between the specific Young People (Youth and Young Adults) Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs) and the wide variety of Youth Groups and Youth Organizations in the context of youth ministry and the lay apostolate. There are many parish youth groups that do not have an SCC component.

On Tuesday, 20 November, 2018 we facilitated a half-Day Workshop on “How CEBs/SCCs/BCCs/BECs Are a New Model of Church Today” at Maryknoll Lay Missioners (MLM) Orientation Program in Maryknoll, New York. There were 12 Lay Missioners, one Maryknoll Sister and one program coordinator. Each new workshop provides new discussions and new insights. Each participant reported on one chapter in the book *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment* on the SCCs related to where he or she is going in mission – Bolivia, El Salvador, Kenya and Tanzania. It was pointed out that this book was published in 2005 with some research that goes back 20 years. So, we are challenged to look at the “new moment” in this year 2018. Specific examples were how the CEBs in Chile have gone down in the past 10 years and how fund raising (what we call the *Michango* (Swahili for collections) Church dominates many SCCs in Tanzania. Using Zoom technology we connected live with Maryknoll Lay Missioner Rick Dixon in San Salvador, El Salvador where he reported on the newly canonized St. Oscar Romero and his historical involvement in CEBs.

The Holy Family Minor Basilica in Nairobi, Kenya has an interesting “both...and” pastoral structure: 10 SCCs and 14 Solidarity Groups such as the [Catholic Women Association](#), [Young Adults](#), [Pontifical Missionary Childhood](#), [Couples For Christ](#), [Charismatic Renewal Group](#) and [Legion of Mary](#). The December, 2018 issue of the basilica magazine called *The Basilican* includes articles on:

1. “The Basilican Parish Pastoral Council:” includes representatives from
 - a. Ecclesial Movements.
 - b. Devotional Groups.
 - c. Small Christian Communities (total of 12).
2. “Story of St Dominic Small Christian Community.”
3. “St. Augustine Small Christian Community: Taking the Gospel to Prisons.”⁵²⁴

⁵²⁴ Articles in *The Basilican: The Catholic Magazine*, Volume 1, Issue 8 (December, 2018).

ADD

The 6th Meeting of the “Network of Small Christian Communities in Africa” took place at the TEC Kurasini Conference and Training Center, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania from 9 to 12 September, 2019. We reviewed the history of our network:

- 1st Meeting – Accra, Ghana, 2014
- 2nd Meeting – Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 2015
- 3rd Meeting – Nairobi, Kenya, 2016
- 4th Meeting – Kinshasa, DRC, 2017
- 5th Meeting -- Nairobi, Kenya, 2018
- 6th Meeting – Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, 2019

On the opening day⁵²⁵ Mwanajumuiya Bishop Method Kilaini had two interesting comments:

1. If SCCs in Africa have many challenges, this is a sign that they are alive and active.
2. There is a danger that SCCs become agents of fund raising rather than agents of evangelization.

Sister Josée Ngalula presented an interesting report on SCCs/CEVBs in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) that used a very colorful and attractive silk cloth in French that explained the Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes de Base (CEVB) in Kinshasa Archdiocese. The archdiocese is divided into 14 deaneries.

Center: A circle with a drawing of two hands holding three flames from three burning logs, an open *Bible* and 14 heads symbolizing the 14 deaneries with the words:

“Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes de Base (CEVB)” – in English "Living Base Ecclesial Communities"
 “For One Church Family of God”

Around the circle: “Archdiocese of Kinshasa: Towards a New Evangelization”

Around the sides of the square cloth: smaller circles representing the deaneries with the names of the parishes.

⁵²⁵ For a summary of the Opening Session see Sarah Pelaji, “TANZANIA: Pastoral Coordinator Calls AMECEA Counties to Promote Small Christian Communities,” *AMECEA Online News*, Issue 296, 13 September, 2019, <https://amecea.blogspot.com/2019/09/tanzania-pastoral-coordinator-calls.html#!/2019/09/tanzania-pastoral-coordinator-calls.html>

Many CEVB icons or logos spread across the cloth

Members participated in two different SCCs on 11 September in Chan'gombe Parish in Dar es Salaam. Altogether the parish has 39 SCCs. The Dar es Salaam Archdiocese has grown to 117 parishes. The active involvement of children and the spirit of SCCs as a way of life were highlights of both SCC gatherings. One team participated in St. Gertrude SCC whose members choose new leaders. They read from the First Letter of *Peter* "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

During the meeting we asked for information on the meaning and practice of "Synodality." Here is a challenging article by Father Myron Pereira, SJ, a media consultant based in Mumbai, India:

"Synodality Means 'Walking Together': How Pope Francis is Shaping a New Conversation in the Church"

Today we have a pope who is willing to make changes when there is a pastoral need. This was seen five years ago, at the very first Synod on the Family (October 2014) which the pope held in Rome. The 2014 synod was like no other — for two important reasons. Firstly, the bishops took as their topic the Catholic family and its pressures in today's society, basing itself on surveys which had been circulated worldwide at least six months before. Earlier synods had been largely on doctrinal issues. These surveys brought up pastoral issues never spoken of in public in the Church: communion for divorced Catholics; artificial contraception and its use among Catholics; and homosexuality promoted as an alternate lifestyle. And in the context of South Asia, the growing place of interfaith marriages and solidarity with persecuted Catholic families, especially where these are Dalits and tribal people. The interim report prepared at this synod was circulated to all the dioceses in the Catholic Church and the pope asked that these results should be studied and discussed by everyone.

Which brings me to the next point: the way in which the discussions took place.

"Speak up!"

During earlier synods bishops and cardinals kept mum. It was the pope who spoke and handed over a prepared report. No one was allowed to discuss anything in public. This is how things used to be. No longer! Pope Francis insists that everyone — bishops, priests, laity — "speak up!" He wants a Catholic Church where everyone participates. This is so astonishingly new that it takes a long time getting used to. For as long as we can remember, no one was allowed to question anything which came from church authority, which might mean the pope or your local parish priest. The worst time in recent years was during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, who censured bishops and theologians for raising questions on church policy and doctrine. In other words, Catholic religious formation, which was known to rest upon free critical inquiry, receded to the level of indoctrination, as any formation does which represses freedom.

Long ago one of the ways in which Vatican II described the Catholic Church was "a pilgrim people" that captures the image of a large mass of pilgrims moving toward a common goal. The word "synod" implies this meaning: people walking together. Yet another term is "accompaniment," as when different people share each other's joys and trials, and assist each other thereto. In the Indian tradition, the word is *samanvaya*. "Synodality"/"*samanvaya*"

means being accustomed to different paces, to different partners, to different narratives. There are no heretics anymore where the narrative is one of dialogue. In this as well as in so many other ways, Pope Francis has shaped a new style of conversation in the Church.

A big question for our SCCs Network: What are the implications of “Synodality” for the development of SCCs in Africa?

We try hard to make this SCCs Facebook Page a place to share experiences and ideas -- a forum for discussion and reflection. We posted this message:

After a great deal of research and consultation we have determined that the five essential characteristics or criteria of the SCC Model of Church in Eastern Africa are:

1. Size: 15-20 members participate in the weekly physical gatherings. The total number of members may be much larger.
2. Weekly lectionary-based faith-sharing that connects the Gospel to daily life.
3. Structurally connected to the parish as a “community of communities” pastoral, ecclesial model of church.
4. Regular practical action and outreach.
5. Ongoing formation and training of SCC leaders and members.

All these essential characteristics are in the context that in Eastern Africa SCCs are a way of life, not just a program or project in the parish.

Please give your comments, feedback, criticisms, further suggestions.

The popular saying -- *When God closes a door, somewhere He opens a window*⁵²⁶ – provides a good metaphor for reading the signs of the times today. In Kenya in March, 2020 during the terrible coronavirus pandemic crisis a door closed, namely the Kenyan Government wisely ordered that our Catholic Churches be closed and that our weekly Small Christian Communities (SCCs) physical meetings be suspended. But then a new window opened, namely Online Small Christian Communities that are also called Virtual SCCs and Digital SCCs. SCC members in Kenya are using (alphabetically) Facebook, Facetime, Google Hangouts, Google Meet, Microsoft Team, Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom and other social media platforms to meet weekly on the internet. SCC members send text messages, audio clips and video clips to their weekly online meetings. Our motto: *Go digital or die*.

During this
Covid-19
pandemic

⁵²⁶ This saying has a long and interesting history. In the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s perhaps the best known Broadway Musical in Catholic circles in Eastern Africa was the *Sound of Music* (original play 1959) . The movie version (1965) was shown and reshown in Catholic convents, religious houses and seminaries everywhere. Julie Andrews was much loved. There is the famous scene when Maria is leaving the convent and says goodbye to the Mother Superior who says that Maria does not have a vocation to religious life but has a special call in the outside world. Then she gives the memorable line *When God closes a door, somewhere He opens a window*.

we have finished one month of weekly Online SCCs using various social media platforms that focus on reading and reflecting on the Gospel of the following Sunday. Now the SCCs are reaching out to the hungry and the needy in our local neighborhoods. What is new in this SCC Model of Church in the AMECEA countries in Eastern Africa is that the SCC members themselves choose the neediest people and families in their local neighborhoods and then the SCC

members
themselves
actually
distribute
the food
packets on
the ground.

In our research we have determined that the one of five essential characteristics of the SCC Model of Church in Eastern Africa is: "Weekly lectionary-based faith-sharing that connects the Gospel to daily life." But

- Some SCCs have faith sharing without lectionary-based Gospel Sharing/Reflection.
- Some SCCs have lectionary-based Gospel Sharing/Reflection without faith sharing.
- Some faith sharing is private, personal "Jesus and me" spirituality without connecting to daily life.
- Some Gospel Sharing is purely repeating the Gospel text.
- Some Gospel Sharing is only exegesis of the text -- not connecting to daily life here and now.

These are some challenges for SCC members.

As a sign of the times here is a new project:

Young people are the future of the world and of the church. But as we all know, church congregations today are made up primarily of elderly people. Covid-19 has opened a window to a new way of celebrating the liturgy and of breaking the bread and wine in remembrance of Jesus. Because young people already live in the digital world, this could be an opportunity to reach out to them.

Our project is international: an outreach to young people to join an Online Small Searching (Seekers) Small Christian Community with other young people from their community and/or around the world. We are working with Fr. Joe Healey who, because of this lockdown experience, has discovered a new ministry, namely, moving from building physical Small Christian Communities on the ground with both adults and young adults to bring young people together in Online Small Searching (Seekers) Communities. The outreach would not be openly "churchy" about religion or the *Bible* or faith sharing. But rather an outreach to invite them to join with other young people to share where they are, their lived experience, what they are searching for, what they feel they need, and find support in a communal experience.

It is important that we continue to evaluate our SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa so we can make it better. Here is some recent research in 2020.

Evaluation of the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Poll Itself:

Every two months on the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website (<https://smallchristiancommunities.org>), there is a SCCs Poll on: "The best part of

my Small Christian Community is ... " The First Round was April-May, 2009. The top months when there were 300 votes or more are:

769 votes: Fifty-Third Round (January – February, 2018). **NOTE:** The high number of votes was due to a hacker.
 512 votes: Fifty-First Round (September – October, 2017)
 455 votes: Fifty-Fourth Round (March – April, 2018)
 443 votes: Sixty-Eighth Round (July -- August, 2020)
 436 votes: Sixty-Seventh Round (May -- June, 2020)
 431 votes: Sixty-Ninth Round (September -- October, 2020)
 421 votes: Sixty-Third Round: September – October, 2019
 410 votes: Forty-Eighth Round (March – April, 2017)
 395 votes: Sixty-Fourth Round (November – December, 2019)
 374 votes: Fifty-Ninth Round: January – February, 2019
 362 votes: Sixty-Fifth Round: January – February, 2020
 345 votes: Fifty-Second Round (November – December, 2017)
 338 votes: Sixtieth Round (March – April, 2019)
 336 votes: Forty-Seventh Round (January – February, 2017)
 330 votes: Sixty-Sixth Round (March -- April, 2020):
 315 votes: Fiftieth Round (July – August, 2017)
 313 votes: Sixty-Second Round: (July-- August, 2019)
 305 votes: Forty-First Round (January – February, 2016)

It is clear that the voting has increased in the past three years. The heavier voting in the first four months of the year coincides with the SCCs Courses in the theological institutes, seminaries and universities in Nairobi, Kenya.

Evaluation of the Choices in the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Poll:

Based on research and feedback (surveys, questionnaires, interviews, personal conversations, visits to SCCs and meetings/conferences/workshops on SCCs), we have identified 1351 important characteristics or features of SCCs around the world mainly provided by Small Christian Community (SCCs) members themselves. Then we chose the most relevant choices for the polls. Every two months on the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website (<https://smallchristiancommunities.org>), there is a SCCs Poll on “The best part of my Small Christian Community is...” with five choices. The top vote getters of 100 votes or more are:

Peer group small faith-sharing community. A 486 votes. **NOTE:** The high number of votes was due to a hacker.
 Mass in the neighborhood. A 211
 Special prayers for people with Covid-19. A 136
 Helps deepen our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. A 136
 Personal encounter with Jesus Christ through SCC. A 134
 Sharing life experiences. A 133
 Prayer, reflection and faith-sharing grounds me. A **Special Poll on first fifty rounds** 125
 Tool for evangelization today. D 110
 Safe place for people to share and grow. D 108
 Gospel-based faith-sharing. A 108
 Reaches out to the marginalized and those on the periphery of society. A 105

Prayer, reflection and faith-sharing grounds me. A 105
 Way of life, not just a program or project in the parish. D 104
 Empowerment of women. D **Special Poll on first fifty rounds** 103
 Combines Bible Sharing and Faith Sharing. A 101
 Youth peer group small faith-sharing community. D **Special Poll on first fifty rounds** 100

A -- activities/content of SCCs.
 D -- dynamics/process/principles/classifications of SCC

Of the 17 choices, 12 are activities and five are dynamics. One might have expected more choices related to the practical action/outreach of the SCCs. But due to low voting levels in the early years, important and popular choices got less votes:

Practical action and service (6th round): 52 votes.
 Reaching out to others (1st round): 34 votes.
 Visiting the sick (20th round): 23 votes.

Also the word “helps” is used frequently in the context of my personal life such as:

Helps me to live my Christian life (1st round): 50 votes.

rather than service to others such as:

Helps upkeep of parish (23rd round): 34 votes.

As we explore the SCCs Model of Church in today’s world, extensive research continues on the church (the People of God, not a physical building) in the *Acts of the Apostles* and other first and second century texts. The link between (a) leadership of the local community and (b) presidency at the Eucharistic meal (a linkage that would drive much later thinking on ministry and even today is a major source of Christian division) would not be forged until the third-century. Similarly, the notion that women, as such, can be excluded from ministry on the basis of some pragmatic historical appeal (e.g. "Jesus did not ordain women!" — assuming such a pre-critical view of "history" has any value), fails to take account of the fundamental role of baptism in all Christian existence and action, that is, by virtue of one’s baptism a lay Catholic can be a local leader.

Many people do understand the Fritz Lobinger Model of Church originally developed in South Africa and by inspired the LUMKO SCC vision and method.⁵²⁷ It is a Council of Elders or Team of Elders Leadership Model/Structure comprised of mature lay leaders (men and women) of that specific local Christian Community (outstation or village). It is not a threat to the seminary-trained, ordained, male, celibate, full time priests in the parish. The Presider or Celebrant or President of the Mass/Eucharist in this local community would be one of the local leaders on this council or team chosen by the local Catholic lay people themselves. He [or she] would not necessarily be the main leader of that local community. See St. Paul’s writings on the variety of gifts in the local community. He [or she] would be married and have local employment. That person would be part time, not need a lengthy training and would serve only that local community.

⁵²⁷ Years ago Lobinger showed me an official letter in German from the Vatican signed by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Doctrine of the Faith, informing him that he is not allowed to discuss married priesthood.

Following the principle of *go digital or die*, we are using internet more such as SCCs webinars:

Small Christian Communities in the Acts of the Apostles. Webinar on Zoom for the CCRI Strategy Team. Facilitated by Joseph G. Healey. A five-session interactive study, discussion and reflection experience using the See, Judge and Act process or methodology. 15 July, 2020 to 12 August, 2020.

Session 1: Our personal (individual) and communal experiences of *Acts of the Apostles*.

Session 2: Foundational texts of the first SCCs: *Acts of the Apostles* 2: 42-47, 4: 32-35 and 5: 1-31.

1. How can we concretely apply the first two texts to our lives, our communities and our ministries in our local contexts today?
2. *Acts of the Apostles* 15: 28: Council of Jerusalem. In today's divided Catholic Church can we have a Council of Jerusalem moment/experience?

Session 3: House Churches with lay leadership especially women. Each participant prepares one passage in *Acts of the Apostles* that describes/illustrates the House Church (also called a Small Domestic Church) with women in leadership positions. House Church were very important in the first three centuries especially when Christians were persecuted in the Roman Empire.

The Edict of Milan was a letter signed by the Roman emperors Constantine and Licinius, that proclaimed religious toleration in the Roman Empire. The letter was issued in February, 313 AD and stopped the persecution of Christians and made Christianity legal. Emperor Constantine's tolerance and acceptance of Christianity paved the way for its rapid spread throughout the Roman empire and Europe. As John Raymaker and Gerard Grudzen write in *Will Pope Francis or a Successor Call a Vatican III Council?*: "History is full of ironies: With the legitimization of Christianity in the Roman Empire, the important role of Home Churches was eroded."

To listen to the discussion, click on <https://us02web.zoom.us/rec/share/-J0yHuvI5z1IAY38t0ePS6k8Hdvpaaa81yRKrqcFnQdtf2QBh48SMJFkDvrtqE0>. Password: 5?%2\$sMR.

Session 4: Importance of the Holy Spirit. Each participant prepares three short inputs:

1. A passage in *Acts* about the Holy Spirit that you like.
2. Example in your life when you felt the power of the Holy Spirit.
3. Example in your life when you **did not feel** the power of the Holy Spirit.

Session 5: St. Paul's call to Hardship and Mission and what it means for us today.

The Second Revised Edition of this book was published on Amazon as an Ebook and and Print on Demand (POD) Paperback and announced on our SCCs Facebook Page as follows:

Healey, Joseph, *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 revised and updated from the 2012 print version, is available as a free, online Ebook containing 1,170 pages as of 19 September, 2020 on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website:

https://smallchristiancommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Build_new.pdf

The First Revised Edition (Ebook and Paperback) – 16 May, 2018.

The Second Revised Edition:

a. Amazon as an Ebook (Kindle Edition and other digital formats) -- 1166 pages, 1488 footnotes, 11 August, 2020: \$6.99. <https://www.amazon.com/Joseph-G.-Healey/e/B001JO5VR8>

b. Amazon as a Print on Demand (POD) paperback in two volumes.

Volume One: 624 pages, 944 footnotes, 14 September, 2020, Paperback, \$19.99

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08HGNS5RW/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=By+Joseph+G+Healey+MM&qid=1599503618&sr=8-1

Volume Two, 560 pages, 581 footnotes, 14 September 2020), Paperback \$19.99

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08HGTT53P?ref_=pe_3052080_397514860

This Second Revised Edition includes over 100 new pages and two new chapters (“Online Small Christian Communities” and “Tracking the Growth of Young People Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs)” from the First Revised Edition that was sold on Amazon in 2018. It documents the modern miracle of Digital Publishing.

The Feast of All Saints or All Saints Day on 1 November is an opportunity to remember and imitate the Patron and Patroness Saints of our SCCs. On our SCC Facebook Page we asked SCC members to list alphabetically by the saint’s name and location their SCCs over the years -- physical SCCs, online SCCs or both. Two examples.

Charles Lwanga (2 June) – Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Isidore of Seville (4 April) -- international

Jude Thaddeus (28 October) – Musoma, Tanzania

Kizito (2 June) – Nairobi, Kenya

Martin de Porres (3 November) – two different SCCs: Nairobi, Kenya and international

Nyabuliga (a section of the village of Nyabihanga, Tanzania – the geographical place name used before saints’ names become popular)

Nyagasense (a section of the village of Iramba, Tanzania – the geographical place name used before saints’ names become popular)

Thérèse (Theresa of the Child Jesus) (1 October) – Dar es Salam, Tanzania

Augustine Post Graduate Fellowship (28 August) -- Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya
 Augustine (28 August) -- Uhuru Camp, Don Bosco
 Francis of Assisi (4 October) – Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya
 John the Baptist (24 June and 29 August) -- Bungoma, Kenya
 Jude Thaddeus (28 October) -- Bwake Subparish
 Karoli Lwanga (2 June) – Tudor, Mombasa, Kenya

The death of Father John E. Conway, MM on 9 November, 2020 awakened many warm memories of our Gleason House Church in the Maryknoll Society Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya that was like a Small Christian Community. I valued especially the daily mass (concelebration of the Eucharist):

1. Dick Quinn would read the story of the “Saint of the Day” at the beginning.
2. The scripture readings were done in *Lectio Divina* style.
3. There was quality in the Shared Homily. We related the Gospel to our daily life in Nairobi and made connections to the world. **NOTE:** I would use these insights in my later writings and talks.
4. John Conway wrote out his “Prayers of the Faithful” by hand. They were always quality.
5. We used silence effectively.
6. Visitors like John Lange, Don Sybertz, Ken Thesing, Dick Smith, Alphonse Omolo and the Grudzens always made fine contributions.

We often hear the expression – the “See, Discern and Act” Reflection Process or Method. Here it is applied to our weekly SCC gathering.

"See:" Touchdown: Brief reports on the SCC members' lives during the past week. Here SCC members share their recent life experiences good and bad. It is called a "touchdown period" or “catch-up time” that can also serve as an “icebreaker” for the gathering. Some SCCs call it “God moments” when each member tells of a time he or she experienced God during the week. Includes a report on the SCC's actions/tasks (community response) carried out during the previous week.

" Discern:" Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection/Bible—Daily Life Connections. Connect, relate and apply the Bible (Gospel) to our daily lives and experience (on both personal and society-wide levels). This is lectionary-based faith-sharing/gospel-based faith-sharing. SCC members share their reflections sitting together in a circle and for a maximum of five minutes. This is the most important part of the weekly meeting of the SCC. Sometimes the SCC uses a Daily Life-Bible Connections method. Start with special themes and topics as well as our experiences and events of daily life and then go to the Bible. Use the “See,” “Judge”/”Discern” and “Act” process of the Pastoral Spiral/Circle/Cycle. Both ways are an experience of faith-sharing.

"Act:" Take away. Choose a concrete practical action/task (ideally a community response) to be carried out during the next week. Ideally it is connected to/flows from the Gospel text and is closely related to the pastoral priorities and activities of the parish or local community. Examples: visiting the sick, visiting members who rarely come to the SCC, helping needy people, preparing both children and adult for the sacraments, justice and peace actions, self-reliance, action of solidarity, etc. This can also be some kind of follow-up/follow-down like a learning or a lesson to take home from the gathering. It serves to answer the questions: What have I learned from this SCC gathering/Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection? What is my take away? What is a point or action to take home? What is my

follow-up/follow-down? Some SCCs include an opportunity for members to express some idea or insight or action that they have learned during the gathering that they will use as their take away or follow up/down in their ongoing actions.

In a report on a SCCs Workshop in Kisumu, Kenya in December, 2020 the facilitator Mwanajumuiya Alphonse Omolo wrote: "As usual, there is no knowledge about AMECEA and even KCCB. So I had to introduce both as has been my usual tradition during these SCCs trainings."

Evaluation is painful, but necessary. Where have we failed? Why have we failed? The basic question in evaluation is: How can we do better in the future? These questions provoked many interesting comments and reflections:

1. Cardinal Polycarp Pengo quoted. At the AMECEA Plenary Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya in July, 2011, Cardinal Polycarp Pengo, Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, pointed out that one of the drawbacks for the solidarity of the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa is that many Catholics on the grassroots do not easily see the link between AMECEA (that comes across as a big organization of Catholic bishops at the top) and the SCCs on the local level. He said: "In five years to come, I would like that AMECEA gets known to the faithful and that they realize it is their responsibility, and not just an institution of the bishops. *Seed* 23: 8-9 (August-September 2011), p. 9. SCCs are a special, concrete way on the local level for this to happen.

Now nine years later this has not happened. Why?

2. Mwanajumuiya Francis Njuguna': "The biggest challenge for the Catholic Church in Africa today with particular attention to SCCs within the AMECEA region is how best to make the SCCs pastoral program fully workable in the pastoral mission of the church. Have the AMECEA bishops laid out specific guidelines as to how the church can ensure that the SCC program is going to be effectively implemented on regional, national and grassroot levels? How come, for example, are our AMECEA bishops not on the same level in terms of their commitment to this SCCs pastoral program?"

3. Christine Gikure: "Have ongoing formation on SCCs at the prayer house level. Ask Christians to say how they conduct their business in SCCs. Ask them also to do a SWOT. That may lead to an informed start."

4. Lourine Olouch: "AMECEA sounds like something foreign and 'up there'. Perhaps Christians have learned to mind their own business when something goes beyond their dioceses. They don't understand their role. Even the term AMECEA needs to be translated into the local languages so they understand. AMECEA recently came up with a policy on child protection. Such are the opportunities to teach and make the association relevant. Someone has to be responsible for the assignment."

5. Father Andrew Kaufa: "Probably the story may be slightly different in Malawi. In preparation for the 18th AMECEA Plenary, we made a powerful communication campaign to make sure that every Catholic in the country knows about AMECEA and plays a part in one way or the other for its success. Choirs composed songs about AMECEA; catechists explained to the faithful what it is all about; IEC materials were produced on the theme of the plenary, etc. It is my hope that Tanzania will do the same in 2022 or even do better. Whether

they connect the SCCs with AMECEA is another story but at least they understood that their bishops do not work in isolation."

6. Pamela Adinda: "In Malawi before, during and following the 2014 Plenary Assembly meeting held in Lilongwe, AMECEA was publicized so that it is now a household name. All it takes is good publicity."

7. Mwanajumuiya Joseph Healey: "Andrew Kaufa gives a very good example about the grassroots preparation for the 18th AMECEA Plenary in Malawi in 2014. I was in Malawi at the time and here is what I wrote in my online Ebook on "SCCs in Eastern Africa":

The Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM) prepared the AMECEA 18th Plenary Assembly on the theme "New Evangelization through True Conversion and Witnessing to Christian Faith" that took place in Lilongwe, Malawi from 16 to 26 July, 2014. In terms of fund raising, Malawian ECM Secretary General Father George Buleya explained that all were involved from diocesan level to the parish level to Small Christian Community level down to the family level and a lot of enthusiasm was shown. He said: "Our Christians were highly involved; they felt the ownership of the event and were willing to support it the best they can."

During a meeting of 31 SCCs leaders (18 women and 11 men) in Kachebere Parish in Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi on 12 December, 2013 I experienced this enthusiasm myself. These simple farmers and housewives in a rural parish were well aware of the coming AMECEA Meeting. They explained that each Catholic contributes 50 Malawian Kwacha to his or her SCC treasurer. This money is forwarded to the Parish Finance Committee and then to the Lilongwe Archdiocese Account for the preparations of the meeting. This was a big success.

My question: If I went back to Kachebere Parish in Malawi today (seven years later) would these SCCs leaders know the names of:

1. Current Chairman of AMECEA.
2. Current Secretary General of AMECEA.
3. Current Chairman of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM).
4. Current Secretary General of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM).

Could you check for us? This would be a good test case for our ongoing research on the involvement of SCCs.

8. Pamela Adinda: "It would be very interesting to know whether the grassroots (SCCs) in Malawi are aware of the current state of affairs at AMECEA."

9. Christine Gikure: "I quite agree. Last Sunday I was training church leaders in a parish in Nairobi. As usual I always begin with the genesis of SCC, thus AMECEA comes in. They couldn't say the whole name leave alone connect it to SCCs -- why they was formed and their characteristics. My greatest worry is that there had been a lot of emphasis on devotional groups rather than SCCs. I always advocate for devotional groups before census questions for the members like "Do you belong to a SCC?" How do I get planted in the big garden (parish) before I sprout in the nursery (SCC). I have been quite passionate about ongoing formation in SCC s because then can the Catholic Church can be strongly rooted in the neighborhood and in the individual self.

10. Mwanajumuiya Alphonse Omolo: “Sooo true! I totally agree! Great work you are doing. Be blessed.”

11. PMS Kenya: “The African Church still depends on the role of the clergy. What they pronounce, it sticks in the minds of the faithful. If the clergy pronounce more often the guidelines we get from KCCB and AMECEA, they will be understood. Unfortunately, even the pastoral letters from KCCB are not known by the faithful and some clergy do not know that the bishops have proclaimed. This is the missing link making the faithful believe the bishops are not giving pastoral guidelines to social and developmental issues. If those guidelines could be rolled out and discussed at SCC level, we shall move great steps in our faith.”

12. Christine Gikure: “Could the Pastoral Department of AMECEA propose to the conferences to identify ways of enhancing/strengthening SCCs. Like each to have a SCC Office at the diocese level? Design training programs on ongoing formation of SCCs? Clergy, religious and catechists be trained on how to 'conduct business proper' during SCCs meetings? Any other approaches towards keeping the SCC vision stronger.”

13. Mwanajumuiya Joseph Healey: “A key is a SCC office at the diocesan level.”

14. From Mwanajumuiya Alphonse Omolo: "As a lay person and in my experience of animation of SCCs at the grassroots, there was never any systematic attention to the structure of the Catholic Church after the parish. The mention about the diocese was/is pretty much focused on the person of the bishop that is fine with me, but I tend to think that it is important for the Christians to have a more practical understanding of the structure of the church, the general and specific roles. I was actually encouraged in one of the trainings in the recent weeks when one of the leaders shared as a "hope" for the training that they will get to understand the structure of the church.

My aspiration for the Catholic Church in Kenya and in the AMECEA Region is that ongoing formation would be made a component of the church's everyday life. That systematic, ongoing formation of the leaders (and Christians) at the grassroots and the other levels of the church becomes an aspect of annual planning and continuous follow up. Perhaps strategic funding organizations can be sought so that such trainings are assured even though a great deal of training could be funded by the Christians themselves at the grassroots level when organized well and in a timely manner. Well-inspired, well-informed and well-trained Christians are likely to be more successful in achieving evangelization at the level of their neighborhood as well as supporting the church to accomplish its calling."

15. Fredrick Nzwili: “But maybe grassroot link is weak. Is AMECEA not more of a bishops’ forum? We strengthen the grassroots link and make it more visible by participating in activities that empower the faithful at the grassroots and even partner with and support dioceses or parishes to undertake various activities.”

89-year-old Archbishop James Odongo, Archbishop Emeritus of the Catholic Archdiocese of Tororo, Uganda died on 4 December, 2020 at St. Francis Nsambya Hospital in Kampala, Uganda. The then Bishop Odongo was Chairperson of AMECEA from 1973-1979. The SCCs Model of Church was established as a key pastoral priority at the 1973 and 1976 AMECEA Plenaries. Odongo is considered one of the founding fathers of SCCs in the AMECEA countries and promoted the importance of SCCs everywhere.

SCCs members pray for the repose of the soul of Archbishop Tarcisius Ziyaye, the deceased Archbishop of Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi who died on 14 December, 2020. In building the SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa, he made significant contributions to:

1. Lilongwe Archdiocese: During our SCCs Workshop in Lilongwe from 16 to 19 December, 2013, the archbishop described how he was part of the Lilongwe Diocesan Mini-Synod as a seminarian in 1973-1975 when the SCCs were established in Malawi. On a trip to Kachebere Seminary I visited the parish where the archbishop learned about SCCs during his Pastoral Year.
2. Malawi: Over the years the SCCs in Malawi have been a model for others.
3. AMECEA: Archbishop Ziyaye was a conscientious and hardworking Chairman of AMECEA. He signed our applications for funds for our SCCs Workshops.

One of the most important SCC leaders is the Liturgy or Liturgical Animator/Leader or Prayer Animator with specific responsibility for leading, facilitating and animating the weekly *Bible Service* and various prayers. Also called the “Prayer Leader,” “Minister of the Word” (*Mwalimu wa Neno* in Swahili), “Bible Animator,” Bible Leader” and the “Bible Coordinator. Many of these Liturgy or Liturgical Animator/Prayer Animators do not realize that their important ministry of animating the weekly *Bible Service* includes introducing the theme of the Gospel in the context of the liturgical season. These leaders need regular ongoing training and updating.

For example, these leaders need to encourage SCC members to study and reflect on the Catholic Church’s Liturgical Cycle for the three big feasts in the eight-day Christmas period. For December, 2020 see:

1. Feast of the Nativity of the Lord (Christmas) (Friday, 25 December): same readings for A, B and C Cycles.
2. Feast of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph (Sunday, 27 December): different reading for A, B and C Cycles.
3. Feast of the Solemnity of Mary, The Mother of God. Also called the Octave Day of the Nativity of the Lord and New Year’s Day (Friday, 1 January): same readings for A, B and C Cycles.

The choices in the SCCs Polls are our way of reading the contemporary signs of the times and getting deeper in the local contexts and situations around the world. Some choices in 2020 especially related to the Covid-19 pandemic and the need to start online SCCs rather than physical SCCs (alphabetically) are:

Adapts to the Covid-19 pandemic situation.
 Concern about the Covid-19 Pandemic.
 Digital SCC.
 Helps the needy during Covid-19.
 Hybrid Small Christian Community.
 Online faith sharing.
 Online SCC.
 Responds creatively to the New Normal.
 Special prayers for people with Covid-19.
 Virtual SCC.
 WhatsApp SCC.

This has led the SCCs Model to Church to explore new ways of becoming church such as online livestreaming masses, Zoom Meetings, Zoom Webinars.

SCCs members can be enriched and nourished by Pope Francis's daily messages on Twitter:

@PONTIFEX:

“We are always on a journey in life. Let us choose the path of God! We will discover that there are no unexpected events, no uphill path, and no night that cannot be faced with Jesus.”

Certainly one uphill path for us in Eastern Africa is an up-to-date, working computer and smartphone and internet connectivity. Following the African Proverb -- *Many hands make light work* -- let us work together to overcome the Digital Divide. For many in Eastern Africa this uphill path is basically a financial challenge -- finding money to support our digital/online projects and activities. For example, the cost of internet connectivity for research, online SCCs gatherings, online webinars and the expenses of the *Mfuko wa Jumuiya*.

We are following closely the preparations for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to take place in Rome in the month of October, 2022 on the theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission”. We are now researching: “The Role of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Synodal Church.” We are eagerly awaiting for the *Lineamenta* to be published?

Prayer is very important in the life and activities of our SCCs. In our SCCs Poll some of the top-rated choices have been:

Special prayers for people with Covid-19.
Prayer, reflection and faith-sharing grounds me.
Prays together for the needs of others.
Deepens my faith and prayer life.

May our SCCs member pray hard for peaceful and fair National Elections in Uganda, East Africa on Thursday, 14 January, 2021.

Our free Ebook on “SCCs in Eastern Africa” called "Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa" is constantly being added to, expanded, updated, etc. The offline version now has 1,193 pages. It is not available to the public. It is a “work in progress.” We post the updated copy to the internet twice a year. The online version (that can be accessed through our SCCs Website under the “Ebooks Page”) presently has 1,116 pages and is dated 11 August, 2020. This version is also sold on Amazon as an Ebook and as a paperback (POD).

The two latest chapters that we are updating right now are listed here in their offline version:

10. ONLINE SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES
14. TRACKING THE GROWTH OF YOUNG PEOPLE SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES (YPSCCS)

We are exploring a new chapter (overall the 19th chapter) called THE ROLE OF SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN SYNODALITY/THE SYNODAL CHURCH.

Our research continues on the SCCs Model of Church both in Eastern Africa and in the USA. We had an online International Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Webinar (Web Conference) at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA in February, 2014. There were 40 participants from around the world. After the SCCs Continental Reports, the facilitator Father Bob Pelton invited the well-known religious sociologist Professor Scott Appleby to give a historical and social analysis of SCC leaders and activists. He looked at three generations of SCCs leaders after Vatican II and when they started in SCCs ministry:

1965-1985
1985-2005
2005-2025

Most of the participants in the webinar came into SCCs ministry in the 1965-1985 period. For example, of the five members of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team present, three are in their 70s, one in her 60s and one in his 40s. Appleby rightly challenged us with the question: "For SCCs to be a permanent and ongoing force and influence in the Catholic Church in the world where is the new generation of SCCs leaders and activists (people in their 20 and 30s)?" This question has been a key learning and challenge for me.

In our present SCCs research I am gathering the names of SCC leaders and activists including writers on SCCs and teachers of SCCs Courses in three categories:

Younger Generation (20 to 39)
Middle Generation (40 to 59)
Older Generation (60 to 85)

Our research indicates that the Younger Generation (20 to 39) is:

1. Very mobile. They move from parish to parish for different reasons.
2. One key development: Young people today are very involved in what we variously call Online/Virtual/Digital SCCs.

On this Word of God Sunday (*Bible* Sunday) may our SCCs members listen to the Twitter message of Pope Francis:

@PONTIFEX

The [#Word of God](#) consoles and encourages us. At the same time it summons us to conversion, challenges us, frees us from the bondage of our selfishness. For His Word has the power to change our lives and to lead us out of darkness into the light.

The online course, the Public Life of Small Christian Communities (21S-LIM-G810-Y01) offered by the Loyola Institute for Ministry, Loyola University, New Orleans, USA started on 19 January 2021. This is the second module. The first module -- the Inner Life of SCCs Course -- was completed in 2020. The Inner Life of the SCCs prioritized the internal capacity of the SCCs: relationships in SCCs, prayer, leadership, theological significance, the ecclesiology of SCCs, diversities of SCCs and breaking the Word of God in SCCs. The Public Life of SCCs course, while grounded in the inner capability of the SCCs, attends to the larger social and cultural environment of the SCCs of which they are a part. This includes the call to evangelize, pray and engage in the works of mercy and works of justice in the light of the Word of God.

The course, taught by Dr. Alphonse Omolo, attracted 22 students from, Ireland, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda and the USA, The students include priests, sisters, laywomen, and laymen. One of the students is not a Catholic. The course will continue for the next 13 weeks and will see students engage each other on the online Canvas platform sharing experiences, ideas, and reflections on SCCs while exploring the extent to which the SCCs can respond to its call to mission. The course includes fortnightly Bible Sharing Meetings and a Spiritual Formation Program session.

Turning over the “Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website” to the AMECEA Pastoral Department in Nairobi, Kenya on 1 January, 2021 challenged us to dig deeper to trace the origin of our website. The plan for the “Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website” was hatched during the National Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Convocation in San Antonio, Texas, USA in August, 2002. It officially began as the “Small Christian Communities in North America Collaborative Website” by RENEW International in its office in Plainfield, New Jersey, USA in 2004 under the coordination of Michael Brough, the Director of RENEW International, with the domain name www.smallchristiancommunities.org.

The website was handed over from Terry Rickard, the Director of RENEW International, to Joseph Healey, the present Moderator of the website in 2008. From a continental website it became an international website with the name “Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website.” The transfer of the files and domain name was complicated. First from RENEW International Office in Plainfield, New Jersey, USA to the Healey Development Office in Morristown, New Jersey, USA. Then from the Morristown office to the Urban Ministries Serving God (UMSG) Office and the Society for the International Ministries (SIM) Office in Nairobi, Kenya.

At that time the Webmaster Nicholas Adongo set up an independent website with a new name -- the “Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website.” “Global” means it is international and worldwide. “Collaborative” means a wide variety and rich diversity of people share and work together to promote a SCC Model of Church:

- Men and women.
- Old and young.
- Different religious denominations including Anglican, Catholic, Mennonite, Pentecostal, and Southern Baptist.
- SCCs specialists and grassroots SCCs members.
- Different languages, countries and cultures.
- People from different places in the world. This is seen in the “Welcome” Message: **Welcome!** (English) **Bienvenue!** (French) **Bienvenido!** (Spanish) **Willkommen!** (German) **Karibuni!** (Swahili) **Namaste!** (Hindi) **Hwan-yōng-ham-ni-da!** (Korean) **Kia Ora!** (Maori) Our eight language “Welcome” represents a variety of languages commonly spoken on each of the six continents.

With a vision to establish a global collaborative networking website for Small Christian Communities (SCCs) worldwide, we share SCCs contact information, events,

materials, and news from each of the six continents (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and Oceania).

From the beginning in Nairobi the host was CNETGlobal Inc. directed by Sam Wanyoike based first in Kenya and then in Canada. In the 2011-2012 period Charles Gikera joined Nicholas in the internet tasks. Charles took over completely as webmaster when Nicholas went to the USA for graduate studies. The website started in the Joomla Content Management System and transitioned to WordPress. Our sister website is the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website at <https://afriprov.org>.

In 2021 CNETGlobal Inc. handed over to the AMECEA Pastoral Department in Nairobi whose server is HostGator in Texas, USA. The present webmaster is Bernard Mberere.

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A very good explanation of the early history is found in Barbara Darling's section on "Small Christian Communities in North America Collaborative Website" (pages 182-184) in Joseph Healey, Chapter 26, "[Promoting SCCs Via the Internet](#)," in Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton (eds.), *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005 (Second Printing 2006, New Cover 2014); Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006 (1st Reprint 2011, 2nd Reprint 2012, 3rd Reprint 2017); and Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2006.

Darling wrote in 2005:⁵²⁸

Thirteen U.S. and Canadian organizations [related to SCCs] are exploring creative answers by looking at ways they can collaborate in their service to SCCs. There was always a loose relationship among these organizations but little in the way of an inclusive working affiliation. As a result of the Lilly-financed SCC study carried out by Bernard Lee and others (see chapter 9), six hundred members and representatives of these organizations convened in San Antonio, Texas, in August, 2002. At that gathering and at a subsequent summit of leadership in 2003, it became apparent that a more collaborative model of North American SCC support and networking was crucial. The decision was made not only for financial reasons, but because this mutuality of purpose and effort

⁵²⁸ Evaluating and assessing these 13 organizations 19 years later in 2024 reveals that

very active
 active
 limping along
 amalgamated with other SCCs organizations
 closed/shut down/ceased operation

ADD

reflects the model of Small Church Community among the groups.

Yet this metamorphosis of SCC support in North America is intentionally a slow process. Particular emphases among the groups such as evangelization, resource development, the connections between SCCs and the catechumenate, leadership training, multicultural church, scriptural literacy, young adults, and the diversity of parish-based and community-based small church must be recognized, included and respected by the whole.

The first concrete result of this loose confederation is a website [like a SCC clearing house) that displays links to individual websites of the organizations. Web surfers in North America will find a multitude of services available to SCCs and can easily choose those that fit their current needs.

Those outside North America will likely find resources and wisdom to complement their small church experiences as well. Strategies are being developed to work collaboratively in other areas so that there is little overlap of services, yet no needs go unmet in North American SCCs.

To find out more about these organizations, go to the Small Christian Communities in North America Website at: www.smallchristiancommunities.org

As I review our 20 year history of the website (2004 to 2024), I am struck by how many times we have bounced back from, and overcome, multiple technical failures, internet crashes, digital errors, security issues, difficulties in international communications, hacking, computer hardware challenges, lack of good internet connectivity, financial challenges, sickness and personal issues, challenges of handing over to new personnel, the Covid-19 pandemic and other changes/problems/obstacles.⁵²⁹ As this international history also shows, changes in personnel and leadership among managers and contributors have sometimes slowed down the management, development, and growth of the collaborative website. It says a lot that despite all of these challenges, this important website continues to go along strong.

Creativity and new ideas is a good sign of the growth of the SCCs. Our SCC members actively participated in the Kenya Lenten Campaign 2021. The theme: “Rebuilding our Nation through Inclusive and Accountable Governance.”

Lenten 2021 English: [Lenten 2021 English Final final.indd \(kccb.or.ke\)](#) Final final.indd (kccb.or.ke)

Lenten 2021 Swahili: [Final-Lenten-Campaign-2021-Kiswahili.pdf \(kccb.or.ke\)](#)

In Week One on “Family” among the proposed actions are: 1. The SCC to identify a Mentor Family that journeys with families facing challenges. 2. Establish, promote and strengthen family life programs in the parish, prayer houses and SCCs. In our free, online Ebook the section on "Lay Ecclesial Ministries in Small Christian Communities in Eastern

⁵²⁹ Perhaps our most dramatic moment happened when our sister website – the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website -- totally crashed and its two Mirror Websites in the USA also crashed. Nicholas Adongo, our webmaster in Nairobi, spent two days rebuilding the website from scratch.

Africa" includes different kinds of mentoring. Having a Mentor Family is new and creative idea. This is very valuable during this Covid-19 pandemic.

Since Vatican II there have been many interpretations of what is the "New Wine" and what is "New Wineskin(s)" in the Catholic Church. Most progressive thinking has focused on "New Structures." A parallel focus is a "New Process." These two foci come together in the new understanding of the New Wineskins as: Synodal Path/Synodal Church/Joint and Open Collaboration. Faggioli states:

Ecclesial synodality and Catholic women need each other. There is no credible synodality without a new role for women in the Church. On the other hand, without a synodal process, it is impossible or at least very hard to imagine Local Churches accepting any decision that Pope Francis makes, included on women and ministry. Until synodality becomes a lived reality, all other ecclesial reforms have but a slim chance to be implemented. The muted reception of this recent decision of Francis on the possibility for women to be formally installed as lectors and acolytes is just one example of the current ecclesial impasse. Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/news/signs-of-the-times/the-popes-decision-on-women-lectors-and-acolytes-did-anything-really-happen/13816>

This has important implications for SCCs that are a new pastoral structure. If SCCs are "a new way of becoming church" and a "new pastoral structure," synodality should be a lived reality of SCC members.

An analysis of the choices in the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Poll (<https://smallchristiancommunities.org>) in the past one year and a half shows two major trends:

1. Influence of the Covid-19 pandemic on SCCs: starting in the May-June, 2021 Poll there has been at least one Covid-19 pandemic related choice in every poll.
2. Emergence of Online/Virtual/Digital SCCs: starting in the November-December, 2020 Poll there has been at least one Online/Virtual/Digital SCCs related choice in every poll.

Current research in Eastern Africa shows that SCC members themselves choose whether they want to reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday or the previous Sunday in their weekly gatherings. Over 90% choose the Gospel of following Sunday that seems to encourage Lectionary-based Faith Sharing that connects the Gospel to our daily life better. This method also helps priests, deacons, Religious Brothers, Religious Sisters, catechists and lay leaders to prepare their homilies and talks with the local Christians in their weekly SCCs **before** their Sunday masses, "Sunday Services Without a Priest" and weekend religious education classes.

The less than 10% choose the Gospel of the previous Sunday for different reasons:

1. When they meet in mid-week some SCC members want to deepen their understanding of the previous Scripture readings especially the Gospel.
2. Calling themselves an Action-based SCC, when they meet in mid-week some SCC members evaluate Step 11 of their previous gathering:

11. Choose a concrete practical action/task (ideally a community response) to be carried out during the next week. Ideally it is connected to/flows from the Gospel text and is

closely related to the pastoral priorities and activities of the parish or local community. Examples: visiting the sick, visiting members who rarely come to the SCC, helping needy people, preparing both children and adult for the sacraments, justice and peace actions, self-reliance, action of solidarity, etc.

This is called the take-away.” It can also be some kind of follow-up/follow-down like a learning or a lesson to take home from the gathering. It serves to answer the questions: What have I learned from this SCC gathering/*Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection? What is my take away? What is a point or action to take home? What is my follow-up/follow-down? Some SCCs include an opportunity for members to express some idea or insight or action that they have learned during the gathering that they will use as their take away or follow up/down in their ongoing actions.

Mwanajumuiya Lawrence Murori has this insight. “Formation of Action-Based SCCs with special names that embodies their practical spirituality can be a significant step. Such groups can be identified with various names like “Beatitudes SCCs”, “Emmaus SCCs”, etc.”

Being identified by specific "action" names like “Beatitudes SCCs”, “Emmaus SCCs,” etc. is a new idea. It is similar to choosing the Patron/Patroness Saint name of the SCC that reflects the charism/identity/apostolic works of the saint like St. Paul (Evangelist), St Vincent de Paul (Helper of the Needy), St. John Bosco (Youth Animator), etc. Let us continue to reflect on the meaning and activities of Action-Based SCCs. How can all SCCs have a "practical action" component? How can all SCCs reach out to the poor and the needy?

Our latest research: Catholic Dioceses in the USA with the best SCCs and best “SCCs

Model of Church” Plan are:

Dioceses:

Camden, New Jersey
Lansing, Michigan
San Bernardino, California
Youngstown, Ohio

Archdioceses:

Los Angeles, California
Newark, New Jersey

Bernard Mberere, the Administrator of our SCC Website and the AMECEA ICT Coordinator writes: “Internet penetration in Africa, and more so in Kenya, is moving at a great speed. Currently there is alternative of an optical fiber connection in the major towns and its suburbs: Wimax satellite connection and the mobile connectivity via the purchase of internet bundles. The fiber home option from Safaricom currently serve in a more stable way with unlimited monthly connection at Kenya Shillings 2,900/= (\$29).” This is important information since low cost internet bundles are crucial for the success of our Online SCCs. Mwanajumuiya Alex Wafula comments: “Very true. Since the outbreak of this deadly Covid 19, internet has been new way of passing information especially for SCC members including discussions with the parish priest. However we face some challenges.”

At the Saint Thomas More Chapel and Center at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, USA the format for the weekly SCC gathering includes:

“Prepare for each weekly session in a prayerful way. Pause for three minutes and offer a prayer of openness and gratitude before leaving a place and going to your SCC. Approach your SCC reverently and not just as the next activity to attend.”

The same can be said at the end of the weekly session – wherever and whenever it is. Pause for three minutes and offer a prayer of gratitude. Reflect on the fruit of the gathering, for example, what is your take away or practical action during the next week -- before rushing to your next activity.

Sometimes humor can be the best teacher and help us to laugh at ourselves. This cartoon was published in the 20 March issue of *The Tablet* after the Catholic Archbishop of Liverpool, England said that he wants to collaborate with lay people more.



In a recent online SCC session we learned more about the Practical Action Step (*tendo la wiki* in Swahili) in our weekly SCC gatherings. It involves service and social, pastoral and mission outreach. It can flow from the “Inner Life” of the SCC or from the “Public Life” of the SCC. It can be the practical action of an individual SCC member or a group action. Ideally it is connected to/flows from the Gospel text and is closely related to the pastoral priorities and activities of the parish or local community. Research shows that SCCs choose more actions connected to the “Inner Life” of the SCC than the “Public Life” of the

SCC. Members of Online/Virtual/Digital SCCs choose more individual practical actions than group practical actions.

Examples: deepening my relationship with Jesus Christ, praying more, reading the *Bible* more, spend more time in contemplative prayer, special Advent and Lenten spiritual practices, visiting the sick, visiting members who rarely come to the SCC, helping needy people, preparing both children and adult for the sacraments, justice and peace actions, self-reliance, action of solidarity, etc.

In our world today we need to think outside the box in preparing a "Select Annotated Bibliography of Books, Booklets, Articles, Reports, Papers, Printed Materials and Other Resources including Online Digital Resources on Small Christian Communities." Most recently, we have many Zoom Resources. If they are stored permanently on YouTube, they can be accessed anytime and often, especially after events such as important webinars, meetings, lectures, talks, panel discussions, masses and retreats.

The death of the famous Suisse theologian Hans Küng reminds me when I met him during the South African Missiological Conference in Pretoria, South Africa in January, 1986. He was the keynote speaker of the congress. I gave a lecture on "Basic Christian Communities: Church-Centered or World-Centered?" mainly from our pastoral experience of SCCs in Eastern Africa. After my talk I received a message that Hans Küng wanted to see him at the next coffee break. Küng explained that in his latest research he had been studying different paradigms of the church: House Churches in the First Century, monasteries in medieval times, the parish in recent centuries. Küng wondered if the parish model was no longer appropriate in different places in the world, and if the model or paradigm of the future is the Small Christian Community (SCC)?

During the Shared Homily in today's Sunday, 11 April, 2021 live-streamed Healey Extended Family House Church Zoom Mass in New Vernon, New Jersey, USA, we connected the First Reading of the Second Sunday of Easter, Year B – *Acts of the Apostles* 4:32-35 -- to our daily lives. It was pointed out that in the first three centuries of Christianity the first Christians (described as "the community of believers") celebrated mass in their private homes (called "houses churches"). Mass in physical churches only began in the 4th Century. In 2020-2021 the "wheel has come full circle" (Shakespeare). During this Cov-19 pandemic we are back to celebrating mass in our private homes and live-steaming them on Zoom.

After our weekly online St. Isidore of Seville SCC gathering today I wrote: "Our Gospel Sharing today reminds me of our reflections over the years on Jesus and the 12 Disciples/Apostles as a Small Christian Community (SCC). We see this SCC as the life and ministry of the Itinerant Preacher and his followers during Jesus' Public Ministry and then the Risen Christ and the Apostles after the resurrection. At different times Jesus is a SCC Facilitator/Animator/Spiritual Guide/Teacher/Listener/Accompanier/Leader/Missionary. One of his key roles is seen in verse 45 of Sunday's Gospel from Luke 24: "Jesus opened their minds to understand the Scriptures." Again and again we see Jesus explaining and interpreting the Scriptures. A similar verse is *Luke 24: 27* in the Easter story of the "Two Disciples on the Road to Emmaus:" "Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Christ interpreted to them what referred to him in all the Scriptures." A key example of Jesus explaining and interpreting the Scriptures is his reflection: "Ought not the Messiah/was it not necessary that the Christ suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"

Our latest research on the success and failure of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) organizations, offices, programs, projects, structures and individual Small Communities themselves in the USA over the last 20 years (2000 to 2020) shows that those that have succeeded have the following characteristics:

1. Creatively adapted to the new internet technology including webinars, meetings and weekly Lectionary-based Faith Sharing on social media platforms such as Zoom.
2. Developed new online resources, including modules on current topics, some for sale.
2. Incorporated younger people as leaders and members.
3. Achieved sustainable fundraising.

A friend of mine – a French Little Brother of Charles de Foucauld --describes a good model for weekly Gospel Sharing in his SCC in Lyons, France:

1. Silence.
2. Reading of the Gospel.
3. First turn: How I was touched by the Word of God (no discussion).
4. Second turn: How I was touched by what was said by others (this helps the listening!).
5. Each one makes a short prayer.

It takes about one hour. There is a deep sharing and very personal. Especially Step 4 is a creative change from the normal Gospel Sharing.

A more personalised lived experience of one of the students, Father Kevin, Parish Priest St. Peter's Clever Lwak, Archdiocese of Kisumu, Kenya.

"I am glad to report that the course on "Public Life of the SCCs" has enabled me to make a very significant growth in the life of our parish St. Peter's Clever Lwak.

1. I chose facilitators of the SCCs which included catechists and those who were capable of reading and writing.
2. We held a three day training for the facilitators. Which was very successful and enjoyable. These facilitators went and spread the information in their sub parishes and their SCCs.
3. As a result of the training, I am very glad to report that I was able to increase the number of the SCCs in the parish from 25 to 51, something that was so impossible before. And now Christians in the SCCs are so closer to each other.
4. Am also happy to report for now am able successfully implement the steps of SCC meetings the majority of the SCCs are following. This has helped me to solve the question of time and absentees of members due to long time spent in SCC meetings before in other words the attendance of SCCs has tremendously increased, of which even Christians are happy about.
5. In the course we learned about youth in the SCC, at the moment, this is what I am seriously engaged in. I must report that I have succeeded in establishing a SCC for the children PMC, in the mother and seriously working on the other subparishes. The youth still have lots of challenges but will embark on them after I have finished with the children.
6. It's my pleasure also to report that I have scheduled the Leaders' Workshop this coming weekend on the new way of life of the Scc and parish life, (leaders here include parish council members, all subparish leaders, and executives of the SCCs.)
7. One more pleasing fruit that the course has bear in our parish is that the Christians have learned that SCCs are not just meant for members alone, it's for the public, the villagers included. Thus there are SCC members who have gone out of their way to look for fallen Christians within their area. They have realized that they too are evangelizers.

Lastly, I am more than grateful to the institution for giving me this opportunity which I highly appreciate."

From *Testify to the Light*, a Pastoral Letter of Bishop David J. Bonnar, Bishop of Youngstown, Ohio, USA (19 February, 2021). <https://doy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Pastoral-Letter-Bishop-Bonnar-2021.pdf>

Bishop Bonnar is clearly a Francis Bishop who understands the life and activities of the SCCs Model of Church.

The Value of Faith Sharing

As we anticipate the return of meetings and gatherings, I encourage us to listen more to each other through the sharing of our faith. I suggest, when possible, that all meetings begin with prayer centered in faith sharing. This would involve *Lectio Divina* with God's Word and time for faith sharing. This is precisely how faith grows. In groups, people prayed and shared their experience of Jesus Christ. They listened attentively and supported one another and as a result their faith flourished. The more comfortable we are sharing our faith, the more at ease we will become in preaching the Good News in our secular world. If we are to grow the Catholic Church and bring more sheep back to the flock, we cannot afford to be silent about our faith. Although there is a time and place for silence, we can never be silent about passing on the faith and sharing our relationship with Jesus.

The Sacredness of Parish Life

The parish is a key place where we live and grow in faith. In his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis writes, "The parish is the presence of the Catholic Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's Word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialogue, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship, and celebration. In all its activities the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a center of constant missionary outreach. We must admit, though, that the call to renew and review our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them completely mission-oriented" (#28).

The Formation of Small Groups

It is my dream that parishes will form small groups for people to share their faith and support one another as they become disciples. These small groups can be tailored to accommodate people's schedules and be made up of men, women, married couples, and single individuals. By coming together in a small venue, individuals can share their faith and encounter Jesus through the Gospel and in other ways enabling them to go forth and proclaim the Gospel. Small groups are a powerful way to accompany one another as pilgrims on the journey. There is a difference between being a follower and a disciple. We need more disciples in the Catholic Church who like John the Baptist can boldly speak in the wilderness and be a witness to the light. Pope Francis says, "Missionary disciples accompany missionary disciples" (#173).

In Eastern Africa "support" usually refers to "financial support." In North America "support" is usually connected to "support groups" that can be psychological and focused on

one need/concern/even addiction. Bonnar uses the word “support” in a creative way. The SCC supports members to become missionary disciples and enables them to go forth and proclaim the Gospel.

Our SCCs are invited to use *Visio Divina* that is translated from Latin as “Divine Seeing.” It is related to the prayer form *Lectio Divina* (“Divine Reading”). Instead of written Scriptures, this form of prayer uses visual elements to help set your mind on prayer. It allows God to speak into your heart through images. Praying through art is a multi-sensory way to connect to God through prayer. *Visio Divina* is one form of prayer using images – works of religious art, stained glass windows, icons, even images in nature. Learn how to pray with *Visio Divina* can inspire SCC members to pray better.

This form of prayer has been used throughout the centuries and is more popular in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox communities where icons are often used in prayer. *Visio Divina* is growing in use across Protestant communities as well. Here are some concrete examples that can be used in the Shared Homilies, Masses, Sunday Services Without a Priest, Prayer Services and Reflections on the Gospel in Religious Education classes:

1. During the Easter Season use a painting or picture of the story of the “Two Disciples on the Road to Emmaus” in the Gospel of *St. Luke*. The focus can be on Jesus and the two disciples walking on the road or the three at supper in Emmaus.

2. On the Feast of the Ascension use paintings of the miracle event in the Shared Homilies and Reflections -- including the depictions of the event by great artists such as Rembrandt.

3. Other great feasts and biblical events such as:

a. *New Testament*: Christmas, Annunciation, Pentecost, Easter (Resurrection), Last Supper, Adoration of the Magi, Crucifixion, Last Judgment.

b. *Old Testament*: Creation and Expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Moses and the Ten Commandments. David and Goliath.

There are many online resources. “Living with Christ” Africa readers can view and download the separate “Image and Verse” picture of the week. <https://www.livingwithchrist.africa/.../05/1620739736.jpg>

As our SCC members look for new and creative models of the “See, Judge and Act” Process or Methodology, here is a model from the Maryknoll missionaries:

Step 1: See our reality.

Step 2: Discern with our faith.

Step 3: Go forth and do justice.

The term “discern with our faith” is fresh way of looking at “Step Two – Judge.” We apply/connect elements of our faith such as the *Bible* and the Traditions of the Catholic Church to our experiences in Step 1. This is the great insight of St. Pope John Paul II in No. 89 in the Apostolic Exhortation *The Church in Africa* under “Living (or Vital) Christian Communities” that states: “These small communities reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel.”

A Polite Teaching Moment

My “takeaway” from the last gathering of our online Maryknoll Young Adult Empowerment (YAE) Small Community in the San Francisco/Bay Area was to drink Fairtrade Coffee at a nearby Starbucks. So to celebrate *Laudato Si’* Week, this morning, 19 May, 2021, I visited Starbucks in Chatham, New Jersey, USA. Politely I asked the person behind the counter if they brew coffee with the Fairtrade label. She said she had heard about Fairtrade coffee but didn’t know what it is. She said she wanted to learn. Leaving the counter she showed me the different brands of coffee on display and for sale. We had a nice chat. We couldn’t find any Fairtrade Coffee. I didn’t want to take her away from her work, so I said that I would look around some more. She was delighted when I found a packet of Starbucks Italian Dark Roast Whole Bean 100% Arabica Coffee. It was clearly labeled Fairtrade Certified with the special square logo. I bought one packet. Then from her supply of the same coffee she ground enough beans for one cup and brewed it for me. Very tasty. An altogether satisfying adventure.

May all the members of our 180,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa pray for, and participate in, the ongoing three-phase Synodal Process/Synodal Journey that has the theme: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission.” May the Holy Spirit guide and inspire our Synodal Process/Synodal Journey.

The synod will open in the Vatican and in every diocese throughout the Catholic world in October, 2021. It will first go through a “diocesan phase” (October, 2021 until April, 2022) and subsequently a “continental phase” (September, 2022 until March 2023) before concluding in “the universal church phase” at the Vatican with the Synod of Bishops in October, 2023. Cardinal Mario Grech, the General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, said: “The synod is not just an event, but also a process. Synodality refers to the very essence of the Catholic Church, her constitutive reality, and is thus oriented towards evangelization. It is an ecclesial way of being and a prophetic example for today’s world.” The General Secretariat will send the bishops a preparatory document, accompanied by a questionnaire and a “vademecum” (handbook or manual) with proposals for consultation in each Local Church.

Pope Francis to the Italian Episcopal Conference General Assembly on 24 May, 2021: With regard to the Synod, he recalled that it must stem from a “bottom-up” process that begins in small communities and in parishes. It is a process that will require patience and work, he said, allowing people to speak freely and giving space to “the wisdom of the people of God”. Thus the three year “Synodal Process” does not wait for instructions from the Vatican and the local bishop’s decrees from above, but starts from below.

Let us pray for the repose of the soul of American theologian Father Robert J. Schreiter, CPPS who died on 2 June, 2021. RIP. His books and articles have had a great influence on our theology and practice in Africa. One example is his Orbis Book *Constructing Local Theologies* (1985; Thirtieth Anniversary Edition 2015). Schreiter points out that local theologies can be constructed with the local community as theologian:

The experience of those in the Small Christian Communities who have seen the insight and power arising from the reflections of the people upon their experience and the Scriptures has prompted making the community itself the prime author of theology in local contexts. The Holy Spirit, working in and through the believing community, gives shape and expression to Christian

experience. Some of these communities have taught us to read the Scriptures in a fresh way and have called the larger church back to a fidelity to the prophetic Word of God.

Concerning “Synodality” and the “Synodal Process,” my greatest “learning” in the last six months has been that the “process” makes the difference in reaching good decisions leading to change. If it is only endless discussion or parliamentary debate on a sensitive issue/topic, a community/group can go around in circles without a resolution. But if is a “synodal process” (that is, discernment in the Holy Spirit and extensive, serene dialog that begins with deeper listening) or a version of the “See, Discern and Act Process,” concrete change can happen. So the right “process” is essential for change and growth to occur. Putting the emphasis on the process rather than the concrete outcome, but the October, 2023 Synod in Rome has to come up with concrete actions (changes) or it will be labelled “just another talk show.” Also we don’t want another endless “shell game” where the “action ball” is tossed back and forth from the universal church to the local level and back again.

How many SCC animators and facilitators can explain the meaning of Ordinary Time in the Catholic Church's Liturgical Calendar? It runs for five months from Sunday, 13 June, 2021 (the 11th Sunday) to 14 November, 2021 (the 33rd Sunday). How many SCC animators and facilitators know that we are in Year B (Gospel of St. Mark) for the Sunday Cycle and Cycle 1 (Year 1) for the Weekday Cycle?

Announcement of new article: “State of the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) at St. Brigid Catholic Church, San Antonio, Texas (USA), June, 2021”

By Belza Ramos, Lay Volunteer, SCC Coordinator

To my USA and Global SCCs Brothers and Sisters: “I am sharing the following report/evaluation that I made to my pastor in San Antonio, Texas with you, knowing that we all faced and are still facing the challenges that COVID-19 brought to our Small Christian Community lives, not only health-wise, but in fulfilling our mission.”

From Ronald Sunguti: "For us in Nakuru, Kenya, the Small Christian Communities immediately after the lockdown started our normal programs. It took some time to pick up, but some picked well although with average 60% attendance. Prayers were done in a common open place. Masses were done at the church. So all of the SCCs came during their specific day for mass at the church. In most places we still have prayers at a common open ground. The most encouraging thing is that people have a lot of positive energy towards evangelization. We pray that we overcome the powers of the pandemic."

We use the "See, Discern and Act" process in our reflection and discernment. Here is the local reality today (the "See") in St. Jude SCC, St. Michael Parish, Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya. The acute effect of the pandemic has propelled many youth not to engage in Jumuiya activities because many of them lost jobs, day to day lock downs and restricted activities in the Catholic Church in order to observe the Covid-19 safety measures. All these including other provisional ways of them trying to fend for their families and immediate family members has at some extent affected many programs like online meetings and physical appearance of some members when needed. The parish together with Small Christian Communities have spent so much all trying to mitigate the situation at hand. We are therefore deeply concerned and afraid of losing our own nurtured youths in the church, at the moment we want to initiate some developmental projects that will keep them in the church and create job opportunities to the jobless ones e.g. car wash, cyber cafe and water point areas for selling water. We've had several one on one meetings with concerned members to implement the project. Financial support will give us the necessary and required energy to start and at the same time job creation will have started.

Now we are challenged to go to the second step -- "Discern."

The AMECEA Coordinator for the Department of Promoting Integral Human Development (PIHD) Father Paul Mung'athia Igweta said the AMECEA document to develop *Laudato Si'* guidelines needs to be "known by Christians within the AMECEA region and the booklet be made available in simple language and understandable by people at all levels including the Small Christian Communities, Parishes, Schools, Universities and Bishops Conferences."

One of the answers to our SCCS Poll (<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>): is: "Responds to Pope Francis' emphasis on reaching out to those on the peripheries." How close this is to: "Go therefore, to the highways and byways and invite everyone you find" (Mt. 22:9).

World Refugee Day (Sunday, 20 June, 2021). This is the perfect time for SCC members to vote for "Responds to Pope Francis' emphasis on reaching out to those on the peripheries" in our SCCs Poll (<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>)

For many years in my teaching and preaching I have searched for different human analogs, that is, an example or analogy in daily life that parallels a "Bible" Passage. In our St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC gathering today, we reflected on the verse in *Mark 6:4*: "And Jesus said to them, 'A prophet is not without honor, except in his hometown and among his relatives and in his own household.'" Judith, one of our SCC members, said: "This is like me. I come from a small village in Tanzania. I went off to get my Certificate in Teaching and my Government Teaching License After some years I returned to my small village. The local people said, "Judith can't be a trained teacher. Isn't she the little girl that grew up in our village."

As we look ahead to Sunday, 11 July, 2021 -- Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. My mantra is *Mark 6: 7*: "Calling the Twelve to him, Jesus began to send them out two by two." The meaning is the apostles journey as partners, as collaborators, as a team, helping each other. How does this apply to our SCCs Model of Church today? Two examples: Team teaching in our SCCs courses and workshops. SCC members visiting the sick and people who have stopped going to church in teams.

On the very rare days that I miss our every Tuesday online gathering of St. Isidore of Seville Online SCC, I share my Gospel reflections in the Skype Chat Box. For Sunday, 11 July, 2021 -- Fifteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year B – I quoted from Sister Mary McGlone in her "Scripture for Life" series in *NCR*. She insightfully said: "We're not simply chosen; like the first disciples, we're empowered." She explains that the fact of our Baptism tell us who we are as God's chosen ones. Awareness of God's love gives us the authority of Jesus Christ to reach out to others. St. Paul says, "I can do all things through/in Christ who strengthens me" (*Philippians 4: 13*).

Case Study of Newark Archdiocese. Cardinal Tobin is in a key position. Newark Archdiocese can set an example for the whole of USA. See conversation with Newark Archdiocesan staff member who realizes that she and her co-workers have to be a synodal team and live the synodal process themselves before they share it with others. Then the team can promote living and doing synodality in our parishes and SCCs. Please note that in our current SCC Poll (<https://smallchristiancommunities.org>) on the topic **The best part of my Small Christian Community is...** one choice is: "Element or feature in the Synodal Church."

There is a new development in our St. Isidore of Seville International Online Skype SCC. In addition to our weekly Gospel Sharing every Tuesday, we are making use of our Chat Room. We post our Gospel Reflections and our Prayer Intentions in our Chat Room for members to read, reflect on and pray over during the whole week. Very helpful. Example of a synthesized Chat Room Reflection: the 12 disciples came back tired, even exhausted and got rest, food, relaxation and a new perspective. Most important, Jesus strengthened, energized and empowered them before sending the disciples out again.

The Jesus Caritas Spirituality uses the well known "Review of Life" (*Revue de Vie* in French) originated by St. (Brother) Charles de Foucauld and popular in youth reflection groups. This is an experience of deep sharing and discernment. The "Review of Life" can be described as praying in a synodal way where everyone is walking together and helping each other. One member describes the overall involvement and experience as:

One of my special SCCs is the Jesus Caritas Fraternity that is a group of priests who met regularly for prayer, Mass, adoration "Review of Life" and a meal in the tradition of Blessed (Brother) Charles de Foucauld. The ideal is a Desert Day once a month. The "Review of Life" is a prayer experience of deep sharing and discernment that combines several features of a weekly SCC gathering.

Pope Francis emphasizes the theme of synodality and the synodal process that is embodied in the SCCs. He has given impetus to the synodality that was introduced in Vatican II -- the entire Catholic Church walking, discerning and evangelizing together. This is an on-going process of listening, discussion, dialog, debate, discernment and proposed pastoral responses that builds on collegiality and subsidiarity under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

The pope likes to call this process a journey or a path -- in the spirit of the meaning of the word "synod." "Synodality is the path of the Catholic Church." This process of synodality is a journeying together. There are many relevant metaphors. One is the process in the Story of "The Road to Emmaus" in *Luke 24*. Another is the famous African proverb: *If you want to walk fast walk alone. If you want to walk far walk together.* SCC members participate in this journeying together through the use of the "See," "Discern/Judge" and "Act" method or process and various forms of pastoral theological reflection and decision-making that start with our life experiences.

Reports that counties like USA and Ireland have Parish Pastoral Councils in 50% or less of their parishes is shocking. In Eastern Africa it is expected/assumed that every parish has some type of Parish Council of lay people, even if it is not working well. When asked how many parishes have Pastoral Councils in Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya a local leader answered "all." The difference is that in a SCCs Model of Church, elections begins from below. First, the leaders of the SCCs are chosen. Then from these leaders come the leaders of the outstations, subparishes and parishes respectively.

In Viana Diocese, Angola, meetings have been underway for almost a month in parishes, groups, movements and Small Christian Communities to provide everyone with training and information on the diocesan synodal assembly that will be held in mid-October, 2021, a step towards the Synod of Bishops in 2023. The aim is listening to and gathering the contributions of each person. Each parish is creating its own synodal animation unit. In the diocese there is a great wealth of lay faithful but, due to a lack of formation and orientation, there is sometimes little participation.

Today, 22 July, 2021 is the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene (Mary of Magdala), the "apostle to the apostles." It is important to remember that the Jesus movement spread rapidly throughout the Roman Empire because of the initiative of female prophets, evangelists, missionaries, heads of House Churches (SCCs) and widows, and financial support from Christian businesswomen such as Mary of Magdala and Joanna (Luke 8:1-3). Early House Churches were led by women of status such as Grapte, a second-century leader of communities of widows and orphans in Rome. Through the House Church, early Christians gained access to social networks that brought them into contact with people from diverse social classes.

SCC members are very good at the "Prayer of the Faithful"(note the singular) . Other names are the Prayers of Intercession, the Bidding Prayers, the Universal Prayer. One commentator writes: "The community that has come together to celebrate the Eucharist has needs, joys and pains, anxieties and successes. Is not that the ground for our Bidding Prayer? How are they to be formed? In some parishes, it is those in the pews who are invited to seek the prayer of the community for a particular need. For many, such spontaneous prayer is a challenge and there is not the confidence to take up the offer. That is understandable. But with gentle encouragement, it can be achieved. So instead we resort to a written form, usually led by the lector for the Sunday, with an introduction from the celebrant."

This reflection may be anecdotal and not research scientific, but still can be helpful. The Catholic Church in Ireland does not have parish-based Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as we know them in Eastern Africa. Most Catholics do not recognize the name "Small Christian Communities." Dublin Archdiocese uses the term "Cell" and "Small Cell" as equivalents. Some parishes have *Lectio Divina* groups, but they are not dynamic or

permanent. Other parishes have *Bible* Study groups that come and go. Various religious congregations and international movements have specialized SCCs following their charisms. But the importance of the Gospel – the Good News of Jesus Christ -- is a common denominator between the parishes that I have visited and our SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa.

Names of the pastoral activities in St. Peter the Apostle Parish, Parsippany, New Jersey, USA (alphabetically). This follows the Small Group Model of Church:

Club
Committee
Group
Ministry
Organization
Outreach
Program
Society

Our Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church is different. In a Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church many of these separate pastoral activities would be integrated in the life and activities of the SCCs. There is room for parishioners to gather for Adult (Men and women) *Bible* Sharing, *Bible* Discussion, *Bible* Study and Catholic Adult Male Faith Sharing.

There is an important new article on SCCs: Kevin Ahern, “Young people are leading a new approach to campus ministry,” *U.S. Catholic*, September, 2021. We can use the article to jumpstart a new promotion of our Orbis Book "God's Quad: Small Faith Communities on Campus and Beyond." Bill Vos will be pleased about the references to campus ministry at Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota. Kevin insightfully describes the challenges to campus ministry with practical examples. I liked in particular: the explanation of the Small Faith Communities (SFCs) Model of Church; how in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, student faith groups have demonstrated a dynamic sense of resiliency; and Pope Francis's call for synodal models in youth and young adult ministry (so relevant as the world wide Synodal Process begins in October, 2021). <https://uscatholic.org/articles/202108/young-people-are-leading-a-new-approach-to-campus-ministry/>

I hope the article can also point readers to another important book on campus ministry: Randy Young, "Catholic Campus Ministry: Fifteen Profiles in Achievement," New Jersey, 2020. Ebook and paperback, Amazon Website, retrieved on 21 August 2021. https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08HZFBNQ5/ref=pe_385040_118058080_TE_M1DP?fbclid=IwAR04qvj55aOy69abU1peGvqsyXXgBqnuvDpM7uZoLnguXpVIUGkz0o3OEME

Members of St Kizito SCC and other SCCs have been waiting for seven years for the new missal in Swahili. It is now being sold in East Africa: *Misale ya Kila Siku (Daily Missal)*. \$30 or 3,000/= Kenyan Shillings. 2048 pages. *Misale ya Kila Siku* comes with various new features pertaining to the Order of Mass, the daily readings, and the calendar of African saints, aspects that had been omitted in previous liturgical books in Kiswahili language. Some of the changes in the Daily Missal include the response to “The Lord be with you”, which is now “*Na awe rohoni mwako*” (“And with your spirit”) and not the erroneous one, “*Awe pia nawe.*” In “heaven and earth are full of your glory”, the word “earth” has been

“dunia”. In the new Daily Missal, "earth" will be “*ulimwengu*”. Responsorial psalm will be “*zaburi ya kuitikizana*” and not “*wimbo wa katikati*”.

For many years the Catholic Church in Kenya and Tanzania relied on the *Misale ya Waumini* that only had Sunday readings. *Misale ya Kila Siku* has readings from Monday through Sunday. In the *Misale ya Kila Siku* the people of God in Kenya and Tanzania will celebrate 19 Saints and the Blessed people of African origin. missal is being sold by Paulines Publications of Africa (Daughters of St. Paul).

There is a tradition in the Catholic parishes in Ireland of celebrating "Stations Masses." These are home masses or house masses of 20-30 people that are very similar to our SCC Home Masses in Eastern Africa. However with the shortage of priests in Ireland these Station Masses are disappearing. A single priest in a big parish cannot get around these homes any more. Could these Station Masses turn into weekly meetings of neighborhood SCCs.

In this midst of lockdowns, social distancing and isolation, sharing faith and hope with one another becomes even more important. As always, we are pleased to provide you with your monthly batch of Faith Circles for the four weeks of September, 2021 spanning from the 23rd Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B to the 26th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B. Many groups are temporarily meeting in their Faith Circles groups online. If you have not done this (or are unsure how) you might like to check out our Zoom Resource Guide. We have also created a new section on our diocesan website—"Nourishing Our Faith" that has links to many faith formation opportunities.

We have published a resource giving tips on how to start and run a Faith Circles small group in your community setting. Click here to download the resource.

[Faith Circles SMALL GROUP RESOURCE.pdf \(dow.org.au\)](#)

Small faith sharing communities provide a place where each person can grow in their faith journey. They are not support groups for dealing with problems, issues, addictions, etc. Faith sharing communities focus rather on the ways in which the Spirit is calling us to live more lovingly, actively, deeply, joyfully and fruitfully our relationship with God, our Church and our World.

An important article is “Small Christian Communities: ‘True Experience of Synodality’ for Church in Africa” by Magdalene Kahiu.



ACIAFRICA.ORG

Small Christian Communities “true experience of synodality” for Church in Africa: Priest

On our Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website <https://www.smallchristiancommunities.org> we are used to the SCCs Poll asking: "The best part of my Small Christian Community is:..." "We could just as easily have asked: "The best part of our Small Christian Community is:..." Both questions can have different answers. Your comments please.

Using "we" and "us" expresses better the spirit and practice of the SCCs Model of Church. One example of the communal dimension of our SCCs is when the practical action is carried out by the community not just individuals.

Message from Phạm Minh Đức Edu in China: “Mwanajumuiya! Greetings from the Chinese world! The Small Christian Communities are alive also here in China.” It is nice to hear that SCCs are all over the world.

People ask how to find our Small Christian Communities Facebook Page. On the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website (<https://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>). Click on the F icon in the top right hand corner to go to the Facebook Page.

Or follow these the steps:

1. Click on the Facebook Page Website: <http://facebook.com>
2. Click on the magnifying glass to place “Small Christian Communities” in the Search Box (top left).
3. Hit enter.
4. Our Facebook Page is the first one listed. The exact title is:

Small Christian Communities
Society & Culture Website

5. Click to open.

Here is the latest "Introduction" to our SCCs Poll:

Welcome to a popular section of our website — SCC POLLS — that encourages participation and interaction. We have done careful research on, and analyzed feedback from, surveys, questionnaires, workshops, courses, interviews, personal conversations, articles, books, email messages, Facebook Pages, Zoom Faith Sharing and Gospel Sharing, visits to SCCs and conferences on SCCs. We have studied carefully the contemporary signs of the times such as the Covid-19 pandemic, synodality (the "synodal process") and pastoral changes in our parishes and dioceses. We have identified 1486 important characteristics or features of SCCs around the world mainly provided by Small Christian Community (SCCs) members themselves: 747 on the dynamics/process/ principles/classifications of SCCs and 739 on the activities/content/outreach of SCCs. The poll uses the statement — "The best part of my Small Christian Community is..." — followed by six choices that are taken from these 1486 important characteristics or features of SCCs. These six choices reflect

both the inner life and the public life of our SCC Model of Church. We change the poll every two months.

ANNOUNCEMENT: You are invited to vote in our new Poll:

Seventy-Fifth Round: The best part of my Small Christian Community is:..

- Experience of synodality.
- We share faith and hope with one another.
- Permanent influence in the worldwide Catholic Church.
- Gives us courage to overcome obstacles during Covid-19 pandemic.
- Support for our spiritual life.
- Gospel is our DNA.

<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>

We thank our Administrator Mwanajumuiya Bernard Mberere (Kenya) for his hard work and expertise. These six choices/selections give us further insights into our SCC Model of Church in the context of our contemporary signs of the times. **NOTE:** Four years ago the words “Covid-19” and “synodality” were not even words in our vocabulary. We thank our African Tech Support Team – Peter Kyalo, Charles Gikera, Sam Wanyoike and Bernard Mberere – who have helped this internet project from the beginning.

From Mwanajumuiya Fidelis Wamalwa: "Very competitive choices this time round. I had to choose carefully among three choices. Like Peter I am following the SCCs Poll to see how many have similar experiences with the SCCs." It is very important that we have her perspective and experience – a young African Catholic lay woman committed to the SCCs Model of Church.

AFRICA/LIBERIA - Catechists in Africa: reference point for Christians in the Small Christian Communities (SCCs)

"In Africa I would never have been able to carry out my missionary service without the help and support of so many catechists", said Father Walter Maccalli in reference to the Motu Proprio *Antiquum Ministerium* of May 10, 2021, with which Pope Francis established the ministry of catechists. The priest, a missionary of the Society for African Missions (SMA), in the note sent to Fides, explained what the catechist does in the African Church. "They are the point of reference for Christians in the Small Christian Communities (SCCs), since they live in close contact with them and animate Sunday celebrations when the missionary priests are unable. The catechist is still today the formator of new SCC leaders, to whom he teaches liturgy and how to explain the *Bible*".

As we continue to encourage Young People Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs), let us be inspired by Pope Francis' prayer intention for the month of September, 2021: "An Environmentally Sustainable Lifestyle." "We pray that we all will make courageous choices for a simple and environmentally sustainable lifestyle, rejoicing in our young people who are resolutely committed to this."

"The Word of God is a source of nourishment and spiritual growth. Its importance in our daily life obliges us to know it and to fully appreciate it. The Biblical Month, therefore, offers

Catholics the opportunity to continue to deepen their relationship with God by listening carefully to his word", affirm the Bishops of Malawi in their message for Biblical Month which is celebrated in September, 2021. The Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM), through the Pastoral Commission, therefore, encourages all Catholics to have a copy of the *Bible*, to read, meditate and put into practice the Word of God.

This year, the reflection on the Biblical Month comes as the Universal Church celebrates the year of Saint Joseph, one of the biblical figures who obeyed God's will in their lives. The Bishops therefore invite the whole Catholic family to meditate seriously on the life of this Saint: "The year of Saint Joseph should be fruitful for all of us, the obedient Father, who protected Mary and Jesus, and taught his Son to do the will of God. We must fully understand that the *Bible* is the Word of God qualified by Saint Gregory as the letter of God, source of all truths. The existence of the *Bible* is the greatest blessing humankind has ever experienced". The biblical coordinator of the Archdiocese of Lilongwe, Father Henry Zulu said the Catholic Church has organized a series of activities to guide Christians in dioceses, parishes and Small Christian Communities (SCCs) throughout the month. Fr. Zulu invites "families to say the prayer for the family using the *Bible*; all Christians are encouraged to listen to *Bible* programs on Catholic radio stations; parishes, pastoral agents and SCC animators are asked to organize retreats for young people during the holidays".

The Church began celebrating the Biblical Month after the declaration of the Holy Father made in 2019, on the occasion of the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Biblical Apostolate, established to promote the Word of God among Catholics.

For SCC members who read and reflect on the Gospel every week before Sunday Mass this advice of Pope Francis is important: By spending time listening to/hearing the Gospel (the Good News of Jesus Christ) we will find the secret for our spiritual health, that is, the "medicine." Every day focus on some silence and listening -- fewer human words and more Word of God. The focus here is on silence -- both in our private prayer and in our weekly SCC gathering.

Mwanajumuiya Nancy Njehia has an interesting photo from St. Robert Bellarmine SCC in Kenol Parish in Murang'a Diocese, Kenya. The firewood on the floor in front of the SCC table symbolizes *mwaki*, the Gikuyu name commonly used for SCC. SCC members assemble the firewood during every meeting to remind members that their participation is key in keeping the SCC fire burning.



May our SCC members learn from Pope Francis's Wednesday catechesis. He says: "If I were to ask you today, "which of you knows the exact date of your baptism?" I do not think there would be too many hands raised.... Yet, it is the day on which we were saved, it is the day on which we became children of God. Now, those who do not know it should ask their godparents, their dad, their mom, an uncle, an aunt: "When was I baptized"? And that day should be remembered each year: it is the day on which we became children of God."

Special Prayer Intention for SCC members:

On 9-10 October, 2021 Pope Francis inaugurated a three-year preparation process for the 2023 synod, which will focus on reforming the synodal process. The preparation process and the 2023 synod, with the theme "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission," have the potential to revolutionize the way decisions are made in the Catholic Church and promote a more decentralized structure of authority.

The Vatican has published two documents:

One, "Preparatory Document for the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, 07.09.2021" <https://press.vatican.va/.../pubb.../2021/09/07/210907a.html>

Two, "Vademecum for the Synod on Synodality" -- Official Handbook for Listening and Discernment in Local Churches <http://www.synod.va/en/documents/vademecum.html>

Let us hope and pray that many SCC members read and reflect on these documents and put them into practice. In our parishes there is ongoing criticism of the homily, the congregation's participation in the singing, the lack of creativity, etc. One practical suggestion is to form a Liturgy Team in our parishes to coordinate our Sunday Liturgies. This team can use a "SCC process" in preparing the Sunday liturgy: the songs, the homily, the participation, the announcements, the parish bulletin, etc.

The Catholic organization Leadership Roundtable based in Washington DC, USA has prepared the excellent "Curated list of resources for healing and strengthening our Church." These resources and recommendations are for the upcoming September, 2021 Catholic Partnership Summit, but are also designed to be a resource for all who are supporters of its mission and work to help build a healthy, thriving Catholic Church in the U.S. The list includes the following:

1. Interview with the Author of "The Pope and the Pandemic: Lesson in Leadership in a Time of Crisis" Fr. Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator, SJ summarizes leadership lessons from Pope Francis (on YouTube)
2. "Young People are Leading a New Approach to Campus Ministry," US Catholic, August, 2021 Kevin Ahern describes how the Church needs the leadership of young adults as "protagonists of change."

See also the following "Recommendation:"

Synodal Church • Launch a nationally coordinated synodal process in the United States using the Fifth Encuentro as a model, with gatherings at the small group, parish, diocesan, regional, national, and continental levels to respond to Pope Francis' call for journeying together.

NOTE: The use of the term "small group" opens the door to involve the wide variety of Small Faith-sharing Communities and Small Christian Communities in the United States.

This recommendation is a clear "Call to Action."

Webinar on Synodality: Paulines Communication Center-Nairobi, Kenya

Please find the information below:-

Event: Webinar on Synodality

Date: 18th September 2021.

Time: 11:00am – 1:00pm (East Africa Time)

By: Rt. Rev. Bishop Maurice Muhatia Makumba

Zoom Meeting ID: 270 304 1311

Passcode: dsp2020

link:

US02WEB.ZOOM.US

Join our Cloud HD Video Meeting

ACI Africa 14 September, 2021 interview:

Father Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator, the President of Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar (JCAM) has lauded the Synod on Synodality, which Pope Francis announced earlier this year to solemnly open next month, on 9–10 October 2021 in Rome. Describing the synod as an inclusive process, he said that Pope Francis is calling the entire Catholic Church to engage in this as a process so that it is not just a one-off event. In a Synodal Church, every baptized Christian has a voice. The preparatory document also explores the need to include the people of God at the local level in the decision-making process of the Church. The JCAM President underscored the need to include the local people in the Catholic Church in decision making processes, all the way from the parishes.

Father Orobator observed that the structure of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is a gift to the Catholic Church especially in Eastern Africa where it is popular. He said that SCCs

give the church a platform and context in which to deepen this issue of Synodality, noting that it is in such basic church groups that people gather at the local level and express their opinions. Jesuits in Africa and Madagascar have announced plans to engage with members of the Clergy and Laity in the Church in JCAM's conversations on Synodality. "We want to bring together cross-sectional people in the church to have a conversation on how we can best support, animate, accompany and enhance this process especially in the preparatory phases."

From *La Croix International* (16 September, 2021): "What might Africa contribute to the Synod on synodality?" Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/.../what-might.../14891>

Of the three suggestions the term "Small Christian Communities" (SCCs) refers to the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC) and Basic Christian Communities (BCC), often called "base communities". BECs are present in most African countries. They are subdivisions of parishes, bringing together several families in a smaller geographical area than that of a parish. A BEC organizes prayers, meetings and recreational or mutual aid activities that help maintain the bonds of solidarity and communion among Catholics. Father Simbine says BECs "are truly places of study, meditation and sharing of the Word of God. They seek ways to express the Christian faith in the typical setting of a traditional African community."

From Peter Cullinane, Emeritus Bishop of Palmerston North, New Zealand
Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/.../mission.../14894>

Yet another starting point for renewal can be found in the experience of Small Base Communities pioneered by the Catholic Church in some countries in South America and Asia. Of course, we cannot simply transfer other Local Churches' experience to our situation. But we, too, can establish smaller communities within our parishes, where leadership can be shared by teams and on a voluntary basis. Such gatherings would be lay-led and need no official authorization. They are happening already, and develop in home-spun ways. The Christian Base Communities in South American countries grew out of lay people coming together to pray and reflect on the scriptures and on their life situations, using the Catholic Action principle: "See, Judge, Act". Their aim was a more just society and more truly human life for everyone – "the route the Catholic Church must take". If this were happening in our own country of New Zealand, we could ask the kind of questions they asked: what are the causes of poverty in our country, and what can we do about those causes?

It is sad that an important bishop can write about the World Church without knowing what is going on in Eastern Africa with its Small Christian Community Model of Church. Where did our communications fail?

Welcome to a popular section of our website — SCC POLLS — that encourages participation and interaction. We have done careful research on, and analyzed feedback from, surveys, questionnaires, workshops, courses, interviews, personal conversations, articles, books, email messages, Facebook Pages, Zoom Faith Sharing and Gospel Sharing, visits to SCCs and conferences on SCCs. We have studied carefully the contemporary signs of the times such as the Covid-19 pandemic and pastoral changes in our parishes and dioceses. We have identified 1500 important characteristics or features of SCCs around the world mainly provided by Small Christian Community (SCCs) members themselves: 750 on the dynamics/process/principles/classifications of SCCs and 750 on the activities/content/outreach of SCCs. It is interesting and remarkable that the break-down is exactly 750 -- 750. The poll uses the statement — "The best part of my Small Christian Community is... " — followed by six choices that are taken

from these 1500 important characteristics or features of SCCs. These six choices reflect both the inner life and the public life of our SCCs Model of Church.

We change the poll every two months. The results of the Seventy Fourth round is listed on the SCC Poll/SCC Poll Archives pages. We are now in the Seventy-Fifth Round that covers September – October, 2021. You can vote as many times as you want, but not more than once in a 24 hour period. Welcome. Go to: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org>

Recent research confirms the saying *the local context is king and queen*. In Eastern Africa most of our SCCs use weekly lectionary-based faith sharing in reading and reflecting on the Gospel of the following Sunday and applying it to our daily lives. In the USA and Europe there are a wide variety of models. Some use faith sharing alone. Some use Bible Study alone. Some use academic study alone. Some choose a theme like a season of the year (Advent, Lent) or a topic/issue (faith, leisure, love, suffering, climate justice, social justice, inclusivity). Some are like a personal support group.

SCCs can meet weekly, twice monthly, monthly depending on the local situation and the decision of the SCC members. Some are mixed small communities of men and women. Some men only. Some women only. Some academic. Some pastoral. Some personal. Some prayer/reflection/ discussion only. Some with specific practical actions to be carried out by the small community members either individually or as a small community.

Yes, the local context is king and queen. Your comments please.

From an American SCCs animator: "I recall vividly my ecclesiology professor (Francis Sullivan, SJ) at the Gregorian in Rome telling us that "if Jesus happened to show up today, he'd likely feel more at home being with the Small Christian Communities of Africa or the Charismatic Prayer Groups in the US rather than the pomp down the street [St. Peter's]." Which has me thinking about the concept of SCCs in the US given that the current model of the Catholic Church in the USA doesn't seem to resonate with many young (and older) people. I know the Diocese of St. Petersburg, FL has SCC ministry."

For many pastoral and spiritual resources for campus ministry visit the Catholic Campus Ministry Association (CCMA) Website: <https://www.ccmanetwork.org>

Join an Affinity Group that is a fancy phrase for "group learning". Different from an online course or a support group, a mastermind meets virtually once a week via Zoom video conference calling. Groups are made up of 6-9 people and all are campus ministers. An Affinity Group provides accountability and encouragement and can often lead to breakthroughs in ministry, faith and in life. It provide campus ministers with:

- Weekly Zoom video conference
- Leadership study guide
- Guest speaker slide-decks
- Growing your professional network

One helpful module is: "The hybrid group coaching and leadership development program for Catholic campus ministers."

St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC three-part SCC Webinar -- the next three Tuesdays --28 September; 5 October; and 12 October on the theme: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation and Mission." On these three consecutive Tuesdays we will add a

half hour to our weekly (every Tuesday) online gatherings and discern in order three topics: "SCCs and Communion;" "SCCs and Participation;" "SCCs and Mission." This will lead into the 16-17 October, 2021 weekend when all 5,000 dioceses of the world are invited to start the "Synodal Process" called by Pope Francis.

My answers:

1. What are your experiences (personal and communal) of "SCCs and Communion."

- a. First learning about SCCs at the 1973 AMECEA Plenary in Nairobi.
- b. Our St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC (2012-2022).

2. What are your favorite Bible passages on "community."

- a. *Matthew* 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

1. What are your experiences (personal and communal) of "SCCs and Participation."

- a. Interview with Peter Sarpong. Woman at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish.
- b. Practical Action projects in St. Kizito SCC Members of St. Kizito SCC planting tree seedlings in the neighborhood.

2. What are your favorite Bible passages on "participation." *Acts of the Apostles*:

- a. Chapter 2:42-45.
- b. Chapter 4: 32-35.

1. What are your experiences (personal and communal) of "SCCs and Mission (practical action, *kazi ya kutenda*, reaching out to others)."

- a. Rita, Rose, Alphonse and I facilitating SCC Workshops based on the two key pillars: weekly lectionary based faith sharing and practical action.
- b. *A New Way of Living and Proclaiming the Church* (1985). Presents 12 Case Studies of SCCs in East Africa as a "Teaching" Video. One is "The Missionary SCC" about a SCC in Iramba Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania that regularly visits Christians that have drifted away from the Catholic Church and encourages the starting of new SCCs.

SCC member Belza Ramos gave a perfect example of practical action: San Antonio, Texas is a hub for immigrants who cross into the USA at the Texas-Mexico border. The Spanish speaking SCC members of St. Brigid Parish in San Antonio Archdiocese visit buses loads of these immigrants and give them food, medicine and a map of their final destinations.

2. What are your favorite Bible passages on "mission."

- a. Jesus and the 12 Disciples are one of the first SCCs. *Mark* 6: 7: "Calling the Twelve to him, Jesus began to send them out two by two." The meaning is the apostles

journey as partners, as collaborators, as a team, helping each other. How does this apply to our SCCs Model of Church today? Two examples: Team teaching in our SCCs courses and workshops. SCC members visiting the sick and people who have stopped going to church in teams.

b. "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (*Mark* 16:15).

Meanwhile we are studying, evaluating and commenting on the following statement:

Just like a parish or a diocese or a National Catholic Bishops' Conference, a Small Christian Community (SCC) is challenged to be synodal, to use a synodal process. So how do SCC members respond to Pope Francis' call to invite/choose/welcome people from the "periphery," "from the margins." Who are these people? Here are two concrete examples:

1. People who are on the periphery and margins of our social and economic world: people with disabilities, homeless, jobless, migrant farmworkers and recent immigrants.

2. People who are on the periphery and margins of our Institutional Catholic Church world: millennials who have drifted away from the church, LGBTIQ people, women who feel they are second class, divorced and remarried Catholics who cannot receive communion, people of other faiths/religious denominations, atheists and agnostics.

Announcement: Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Online Course on "The Inner Life of SCCs" starting on 17 January, 2022. The online course is offered by the Loyola Institute of Ministries (LIM) at Loyola University located in New Orleans, Louisiana USA. For more information visit the Loyola University website:

As we pray for and with Young People Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs) around the world, we are reminded that the 36th World Youth Day takes place on Sunday, 21 November 2021 and will be celebrated in dioceses around the globe as the Catholic Church prepares for the 2023 WYD in Lisbon, Portugal. Pope Francis released his message for the 2021 Diocesan WYD on Monday, 28 September, 2021 under the theme: "Arise. I appoint you as a witness of what you have seen" (*Acts* 26:16).

In the message the pope pointed to the important role that young people have to play in the world, especially as they have faced enormous setbacks and difficulties due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Many young people, said the pope, experienced a rise in family problems, unemployment, depression, loneliness, and addictive behavior. But, he added, the experience of the pandemic has also revealed the virtues of young people, including our "inclination to solidarity." "Whenever a young person falls, in some sense all humanity falls," he said. "Yet it is also true that when a young person rises, it is as if the whole world rises as well." With that in mind, Pope Francis urged young Christians to "arise" and help the world start afresh with their passion and enthusiasm.

My topics for discernment in the Synodal Process:

1. Small Christian Communities.
2. Parish Pastoral Councils.

3. Homilies by all the People of God including qualified lay men and laywomen..⁵³⁰

Our SCC members need pastoral and spiritual "tools" for their formation and growth. That is why it is good to see SCC members raise money to buy the new Swahili Missal -- *Misale ya Kila Siku*. It will be big help to our *jumuiyas* for our weekly lectionary based faith sharing.

Sister Donna Ciangio, OP has been named the Coordinator of the Synodal Process in Newark Archdiocese, New Jersey, USA. The Synodal Way will begin with Mass on Sunday, 17 October. Donna is a great supporter of the SCC Model of Church. When she animates Parish Pastoral Councils in the archdiocese, she encourages the meetings to start not just with a prayer but with Communal Faith Sharing.

As we continue to gather examples of Zoom Small Faith Communities, here is an interesting example from the "Scripture Reflection Series" of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time (10 October, 2021)

by Mary Beth Buchner

Back in February, 2021 when the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns in Washington DC invited me to write a Scripture reflection, I hesitated. I was scared but I felt honored to be asked so I really didn't want to turn down this opportunity. When it was finally time to write the reflection, I read the readings over a few times to myself and found my fear level rising. I still wasn't gaining clarity.

I sent an SOS email requesting help to my cousin, Noel, who is part of the Goshen Maryknoll Affiliates Group, which meets weekly to discuss Scripture readings over Zoom. I have been joining them since the beginning of the pandemic. I was relieved when they agreed to focus on the readings for this week, the 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, even though it was out of sequence. The discussion was most fruitful and my anxiety lessened a little. Then I prayed to the Holy Spirit to enlighten me. Many thoughts surfaced and woke me up in the middle of the night...

For the rest of the homily (who remembers Paul Harvey?) go to:
<https://maryknollogc.org/resources/scripture-reflection>

As we begin this "Synodal Process" around the world from October, 2021 to October, 2023 Pope Francis has called for open discussion in the Catholic Church. He is not afraid of arguments and disagreements. "Open and fraternal debate makes theological and pastoral thought grow. That doesn't frighten me. What's more, I look for it," he said. He remembers attending synods where the bishops were told that certain topics were off the table. Rather, he told the Fall, 2015 Synod on the "Family," "Speak clearly. Let no one say, 'This can't be said, they will think this or that about me.' Everything we feel must be said with *parrhesia* [the

⁵³⁰ Even though presently lay people (women and men) cannot officially preach at mass, the priest or deacon can take good examples from online homilies by lay people. Two good sources are "Catholic Women Preach" and the "Scripture Reflection Series" of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

Greek for boldness].” He purposefully used this Greek word that describes the boldness with which St. Paul spoke to St. Peter at the Council of Jerusalem in arguing against making the Gentiles follow Jewish practices.

Our research continues on the reasons for the slow response to the SCCs Model of Church in the USA. One experienced, older pastor comments: "As our presbyterate evolves, from my generation of Vatican II priests (most now retiring or retired) to the John Paul II priests and to the Benedict priests, there is little interest in either the "base communities" model or "fraternal associations" like the Jesus Caritas Fraternities. These models are actually rather incompatible with their top-down, hierarchical and very clerical ecclesiology."

From an American diocesan priest involved in Jesus Caritas Fraternities (priests, laypeople, mixed) in the USA: "Through the years I have belonged to, and created, several lay fraternities, always trying to create small communities. I still believe the future of the Catholic Church anywhere is small communities, living an alternative to the ‘big tent’ church.”

A good motto in internet ministry is *we create the path by walking*. During our St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC Gathering today we had 9 online participants: 3 men. 6 women. Plus one woman in our Chat Room. Plus Sister Rita sending greetings. Total: 11 members. Our Moderator Mwanajumuiya Alphonse Omolo experimented with the "Skype Together Mode" (panoramic view with us sitting in the first row of seats in a large airplane). He recorded our half hour Skype SCC Webinar on the “Synodal Process” topic of "participation." Go to: <https://join.skype.com/FefOEMaIHbhh> The webinar was 33 minutes and 57 seconds. The video recording will be available for 30 days in our Chat Room.

Food for reflection as we SCC members participate in the "Synodal Process:"

“What is the origin of synods? From the earliest days of the Catholic Church, people gathered to discern when they were faced with a crisis or at a turning point. The *Acts of the Apostles* tell that when the early Christian communities needed to resolve certain practical problems (appointing deacons to serve the widows and orphans) or pastoral questions (not imposing Jewish dietary laws on the Gentile Christians), they held an assembly of believers, called on the Holy Spirit and discussed with those in authority. The convocation of assemblies (= synods) is a very old and traditional practice in the Catholic Church. It has taken place with more or less intensity according to the periods of history.”

Here is a challenging and insightful new article published on 13 October, 2021:

“Are Basic Christian Communities the Way to Achieving Synodality?”

By Charles Ayetan

The first Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) to be established by Catholics in the West African nation of Togo appeared in 1995... "Structuring into a Basic Christian Community (BCC) represents a form of decentralization within the Catholic Church and allows the pastor and his collaborators to better know their parish, the faithful and their realities," explained Father Gabriel Hozo, pastor of a parish in Kara Diocese, based 414 kilometers north of Lomé. The clergy "thus have a global view of their parish, which avoids slowness and blockages, favors pastoral work and in-depth evangelization,"

the priest said. "These communities represent a lever towards a more Synodal Church that takes into account the opinion and contributions of the faithful, just as Pope Francis wishes for the Synod of 2023," noted Father Hozo. At the community he oversees, delegates represent the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) in the Parish Pastoral Council and thus participate in decision-making. The BCCs have a fundamental role to play through the reflections and responses to be included in the preparatory documents of this synod," said Iréné Silété Tokanou, the coordinator of the BCCs in Lome Archdiocese. "But it is still necessary to continue to establish these communities where they do not yet exist, and above all to supervise and train the Christian faithful in order to avoid aberrations," he added.

After our weekly St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC Gathering today, we had a half hour SCCs Skype Webinar on "SCCs and Mission." Our first question was: What are your experiences (personal and communal) of "SCCs and Mission (practical action, *kazi ya kutenda*, reaching out to others)." SCC member Belza Ramos gave a perfect example of practical action: San Antonio, Texas is a hub for immigrants who cross into the USA at the Texas-Mexico border. The Spanish speaking SCC members of St. Brigid Parish in San Antonio Archdiocese visit bus loads of these immigrants and give them food, medicine, clothing and a map of their final destinations. We ended by discussing concrete ways that we can practice synodality in our St. Isidore of Seville Online International SCC. SCC member Belza Ramos suggested that part of our "Synodal Process" could focus on sharing our international character. Active members live in four countries: Germany, Kenya, Tanzania and USA. The webinar was recorded.

After our weekly St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC finished three half hour SCCs Skype Webinars on the three main topics of the Synod/Synodal Process, we are affirmed by this statement by Archbishop Jose Gomez of Los Angeles who is the president of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

Question: "When you say people should get involved or be engaged by the Synod, how do you see that happening?"

Answer: "I think that a good way to think about it is the sub-header of the Synod: Community, participation and mission. This is a good way of understanding what the Synod is all about. And we need to remember that the Church is not just the priests or the bishops, but the People of God, so I think this Synod gives us an opportunity to share with each other, because we are all called to holiness. I think that historically some have had the impression that the Catholic Church are the bishops and the priests, but no, we all are the church. Everything starts with the baptism, and it's the same for everybody."

SCC member Belza Ramos asks: "How are we practicing synodality in our St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC?" For me the starting point is to **LISTEN** to the 12-13 members who are presently silent/not joining our weekly gatherings especially the young adults. Why? Is it 1. Lack of money 2. Lack of internet connection. 3 Lack of a good computer/smartphone. 4. Conflict with work/study schedule. 5. Not a priority right now. 6. Health issues. 7. Over-extension/exhaustion. 8. Misfortunes such as theft of smartphones. 9. Young Adults' social media platform preferences (including not using much email). 10. Other. Mwanajumuiya Lawrence Murori asks: "Could we carry out a survey among the silent ones and especially the young adults as you pointed out? It might help to unearth the mental models within them." Mwanajumuiya Judith said: "The answer is Number 3. I don't have a smart phone or a computer. That's why I often use Sister Rita's phone. My two smart phones

were stolen when I was in a *Matatu/Daladala* (public transport). Now that I don't have a laptop, it makes it difficult for me to be on line.”

La Croix International is an Independent Online Catholic Daily News Service (<https://international.la-croix.com>) As the preparatory phase of the Synod of Bishops' assembly on synodality opens on Sunday, 17 October, 2021 in local dioceses around the world, *La Croix* is following three places including a Basic Christian Community on the outskirts of Sao Paulo (Brazil). <https://international.la-croix.com/.../a-parish-in.../15060>

Pope Francis' Twitter message today is a good guide for SCC members as we begin the "Synodal Process:" "The Word of God summons us to discernment and guides the [#Synod](#), so it may be filled with grace, a healing process guided by the Spirit, in which Jesus calls us to ask what God wants to say to us in this time, and the direction in which he wants to lead us. [#ListeningChurch](#)"

Zoom is offering new opportunities for SCCs. A Small Christian Community in Los Angeles California, USA met regularly in person. When Covid-19 came it began meeting online. Although one member moved to San Francisco and another member moved to the state of South Dakota, these two members could still participate through Zoom Meetings.

Archbishop Romulo Valles of Davao, Philippines explained that this Synod is a journey, “a convocation guided by the Spirit for the challenge of mission”. As dioceses gather together in small circles in parishes, schools and Basic Ecclesial Communities in the coming months, he said, the Catholic Church will look within and also at how it is together with the entire human family. Hence, it will pray together and ask the Spirit to lend us His eyes, mind and heart. “We will look at two landscapes not with our eyes but with the eyes of the Lord.” Local communities will find out how this journeying together is happening today and what the Spirit is asking of them; how the life of worship gives way to the life of charity; and how faith is lived and shared. In its relationship with the human family, the CBCP president said that local communities will examine whether they are still the salt and light for the world; whether there is a dialogue of life, ready to listen to others with respect and humility despite differences.

As we SCC members begin the diocesan phrase of the "synodal process," Pope Francis' Twitter message can inspire and encourage us: "Dear brothers and sisters, have a good journey! May we be open to the Holy Spirit's surprises, the grace of encounter, reciprocal listening and discernment, joyfully convinced that, even as we seek the Lord, He always comes with His love to meet us first. [#Synod](#) [#ListeningChurch](#)"

How many SCC members know that Sunday, 24 October, 2021 is the celebration of World Mission Sunday (always the second to last Sunday in October). Research shows that:

- Many people do not know about the celebration.
- Others forget.
- Others don't care.
- Others mix up the dates. Again this year some calendars have it wrong. It seems that in our complex liturgical year the “second to last Sunday in October” (not necessarily the third Sunday of October) is just too hard to understand.

The theme Pope Francis has chosen for his 2021 World Mission Sunday message is: "We cannot but speak about what we have seen and heard (Acts of the Apostles 4:20)." In the message he says: “Once we experience the power of God's love we cannot help but proclaim and share

what we have seen and heard. Jesus' relationship with His disciples and His humanity shows us the extent to which God loves our humanity and makes His own our joys and sufferings, our hopes and our concerns."

This speaks to SCC members. We speak of our SCC experiences. We share the SCC Model of church with others.

I am delighted that Paterson Diocese in New Jersey, USA, the diocese in which I am presently residing, has a Synodal Process. Bishop Kevin Sweeney writes:

I believe it may be providential that we had scheduled our annual World Mission Sunday Mass for 24 October, 2021 and it can be celebrated as our Opening Mass for the Synod. In so much of the literature and preparation for the Synodal Process, we are reminded of our call to be "missionary disciples," so I believe that it is very fitting that we can celebrate these two moments at this liturgy. All of our pastors and parishes have been asked to choose two representatives to attend the Opening Mass and we hope that those two parishioners will be involved in the parish effort to participate in the Synod Process. We have also invited some other "ecclesial communities" and groups, such as our religious orders, schools, communities, deacons, and retired priests to send representatives.

I can already see that one of the benefits of the Synod will be a greater awareness of all the ecclesial communities, movements, and groups who make up the Catholic Church of our diocese. If anyone is reading this and is not sure whether a particular group has been invited to send representatives to the Opening Mass, I would ask you to contact Father Paul Manning, our Vicar for Evangelization, who is heading the committee that is working on our plans for, and participation in, the Synod, especially over the next six months during this "First/Local Phase" in the process. Father Manning can be reached at: pmanning@patersondiocese.org.

It is interesting that in some parishes in Eastern Africa the annual SCCs Day is celebrated on World Mission Sunday.

As we SCC members begin the diocesan phrase of the "synodal process," Pope Francis' Twitter message can inspire and encourage us: "Dear brothers and sisters, have a good journey! May we be open to the Holy Spirit's surprises, the grace of encounter, reciprocal listening and discernment, joyfully convinced that, even as we seek the Lord, He always comes with His love to meet us first. [#Synod #ListeningChurch](#)"

As the Synodal Process has begun in all the dioceses of the USA, here is some SCC language being used:

Gary Diocese in Indiana will conduct discussions with people from young, elderly and intercultural populations, doing so in groups as small as seven people at a time to encourage candid discussion.

St. Augustine Diocese in Florida plans to designate people from different cultures to lead some of its Listening Groups so that all participants feel comfortable.

Many of the dioceses contacted by "America" Magazine reported no plan to reach beyond parishes, and Parish Discussion Groups will likely draw in only those who are already most

involved in the parish. While these voices are certainly important, the Vatican has stressed reaching out to those on the margins of the church or outside it.

All SCC members congratulate, and offer prayers for:

AFRICA/KENYA - Appointment of the Archbishop of Nairobi
 Vatican City (Agenzia Fides) - The Holy Father Francis has appointed His Exc. Mgr. Philip A. Anyolo, currently Metropolitan Archbishop of Kisumu as Metropolitan Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Nairobi (Kenya). (SL) (Agenzia Fides, 28/10/2021)
 Hongera. Pongezi.

Greetings from Notre Dame, Indiana, USA.

Happy World Mission Sunday.

On Saturday, 23 October, 2021 I had the privilege of presiding at a Memorial Eucharistic Liturgy for Father Bob Pelton, CSC here at the University of Notre Dame. Bob was born on 29 May, 1921 and died on 4 November, 2019. That means that this year he would have been 100 years old. In the homily I told three Bob Pelton stories. We all remember Bob as a wonderful friend, a zealous missionary, a capable coordinator of international conferences, a writer of many books and articles and a great promoter of Small Christian Communities (Basic Christian Communities).

After mass we went to the nearby cemetery of the Holy Cross Fathers and Brothers and prayed at Bob's grave and blessed his grave. May we harvest the rich memories of Bob Pelton and follow his shining example. RIP.

The listening process that is beginning is good news for the faithful of St. Paul the Apostle CEB. Here, as in most of the outlying areas of São Paulo, Brazil, where Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) are concentrated, the economic crisis, hunger and unemployment leave no respite for the inhabitants. When Pope Francis speaks of the "most vulnerable or marginalized" in the *Vademecum* (or handbook) of the Synod on synodality, it is they who come to mind. In spite of everything, energy is indeed there for these discussions, as well as for all the daily social struggles, which makes this BCC of the vast Catholic community of Belém a relevant group to follow in the coming months. Further on the periphery of São Paulo, the subprefecture of São Mateus is home to nearly 400,000 people.

A dozen lay people have recently gathered to begin reflecting on how they can best participate in the synodal process. These men and women are all involved in social movements and very active in the outskirts of the city. They meet online. Thanks to this first meeting, they were able to discover together the working documents for the synod and to discuss the challenges for their episcopal regions.

Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/.../giving-a.../15097>

May SCC members participate. The Vatican on Tuesday launched a website and smartphone app to help Catholics pray for the success of the two-year process culminating in the 2023 synod on synodality. At prayforthesynod.va, Catholics can find information in English, Spanish, and other languages about how to support the synod through prayer. "This website, together with the app Click To Pray, aims to accompany the synodal way for prayer.

prayforthesynod.va

"The Varieties of Religious Community Today" is published in the November, 2021 issue of *Commonweal*. It is a series of articles devoted to Catholic religious communities, in t

broadest sense of that term. The Catholic Church has, from its earliest centuries, found room for special intentional communities: religious orders, secular institutes, confraternities and sodalities, lay ecclesial movements, pious houses, and houses of hospitality. I would have liked to see more specific mention of Intentional Eucharistic Communities such as Nova, Communitas and Francis House as well as examples of intentional Small Christian Communities/Basic Christian Communities as a Pastoral Model of Church. How these communities have adapted to our Zoom digital way of life is significant. These are documented in Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton (eds.), *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005 (Second Printing 2006, New Cover 2014); Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006 (1st Reprint 2011, 2nd Reprint 2012, 3rd Reprint 2017); and Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2006. Available as an Ebook at Orbis Books and Amazon.

SCC members are reminded from time to time to check the "Calendar of Events" on the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website:

1. Synodality in Africa Webinar – 18 November 2021 at 2PM (EAT)
2. Announcement: Online SCCs Course starting on 17 January, 2022

Always learning. As we research the expressions “Eucharistic Famine” and “Eucharist Hunger” (used especially in Eastern and Southern Africa) for developing a SCCs Model of Church, we learn of the similar expression “Eucharistic Deprivation” used in Nigeria. There are different meanings of “Deprivation.” First, the local Catholic community, especially in rural areas of Africa, can be deprived of participating in mass and receiving the Eucharist (Holy Communion). Second, the local Catholic community, especially in rural areas of Africa, can be deprived of receiving the Eucharist (Holy Communion) at a “Sunday Services Without a Priest.” Nigerian Jesuit priest Father Michael Oluwadare, SJ is writing his licentiate thesis in the area of concentration in Liturgy at Santa Clara University on “Eucharistic Deprivation in the Western Part of Nigeria.”

When people ask: Who knows some good resources for student *Bible* study groups?, a good answer is: *The Catholic Lectionary: The Three Year Liturgical Cycle (A, B and C)* with many contemporary commentaries available. Lectionary based faith sharing is the heart of the SCCs Model of Church. As we come to the end of the Catholic Church's Liturgical Year (Year B), may SCC members be conscious of the plan of the Scripture Readings and the Lectionary Cycle.

There are an increasing number of webinars related to SCCs. Please note that to join/participate you have to click on "Register" and fill in your name and email address. Then you will be sent the link to join the webinar or you can simply click on the website prompt to join the webinar.

One of the choices in our present Poll (<https://smallchristiancommunities.org>) is: Seventy-Sixth Round: The best part of my Small Christian Community is...”Helps us learn from the Covid-19 pandemic.” In our St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC today we discussed how we are part of a community. So there is a community response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Wearing a mask and getting vaccinated is not just an individual, private, personal action/response. It is also for the sake of other people, for the local community.

Two regional conferences -- the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) and the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar (JCAM) --

are collaborating on how the Church in Africa can successfully realize goals of the upcoming 2023 Synod of Bishops. JCAM's President Father Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator explained that the reflection axis calls on theologians to "explore essential themes emphasized in the synodal documents and by Pope Francis including synodality, listening, the Holy Spirit, discernment, participation/inclusion, methodology, Small Christian Communities, parishes and African models and practices." The Secretary General of AMECEA Father Anthony Makunde emphasized making good use of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as a basis for the synodal journey "since it is a treasure in the region and has become part of us. Theologians should now help us come up with new ways of listening, new ways of thinking in the SCCs so this can be a unique contribution from the African continent to the Universal Church."

With the interest in the "Synodal Process" and deeper listening, we are asking our SCC members how we can make creative use of silence in our online Zoom gatherings (that are different from in person gatherings). Please give your experiences and suggestions. In both Sunday Mass and our weekly SCCs meetings the one minute of silence after the reading of the Gospel is important. What is God saying to us about the meaning of this Gospel text in the context of our daily life, of today's world? How do we apply the Gospel to our here and now? Silence brings deeper insight and understanding. Step 7 in the 13 Steps in the "Weekly Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection/Bible—Daily Life Connections Service of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa." "Silence. Listen to what God is saying/what God wants to tell us in the Gospel passage. This period of silence is not wasted time or empty time. It can be a time of deeper listening and deeper reflection."

In the Webinar on "Synodality in Africa" on 18 November 2021 Sister Josée Ngalula emphasized the importance of the "structure" of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) on the grassroots level in Africa. We have to use and consolidate this basic structure to help us listen to the People of God especially laymen and lay women. SCCs is an ecclesial model of the Catholic Church in Africa. The new language is spiritual conversation, mutual listening and prayerful discernment. SCCs represent the spirit of synodality and the synodal process. SCC members are invited to pray for the first Ecclesial Assembly that opened in Mexico City, Mexico on Sunday, 21 November, 2021 bringing together Caribbean and Latin American countries. The week-long meeting represents an outcome of the Synodal Path recently initiated by Pope Francis with more than one thousand participants gathered in Mexico City and online. This "Synodal Process" will take place with the aim of changing certain structures and giving new space and importance to the voice of all the baptized, something different from when it concerned a meeting of only bishops in Aparecida, Brazil in 2007. Members of CEBs in Latin America are participating.

In Nakuru Diocese, Kenya reports: "The bishop formed a team of seven members to address and to lead the synodal process. We have met on several occasions. We have prepared the guide or the syllabus which is assisting as for the inductions and sensitization, Nakuru being the first Diocese to spearhead among the dioceses in Kenya. We had a meeting at our Pastoral Center for other dioceses within the Metropolitan of Nairobi to benchmark from us ,that's was 17th-20th of October. After that we have visited all the 11 Deaneries of Nakuru Diocese. This has followed the formation of Deanery teams which later will lead us to parish,outstation, Small Christian community teams which will respond to guiding questions that will lead us to have a lineamenta that will be our guide. After qll the people participating in answering the questions we shall converge on 7th to 10th of February 2022 to collate the materials. Then after that the document will be forwarded to the next level. But for

us after getting where our Diocese is and issues affecting our Diocese, it will guide us to to have pastoral interventions through the Small Christian Communities.”

In a short video, Sister Donna Ciangio, OP, the Coordinator of the Synodal Process in Newark Archdiocese, New Jersey, USA has this insight when she says: "The purpose of this lengthy and deep Synodal Process in our archdiocese is not just to answer a questionnaire from the Vatican but to improve the quality of the Catholic life, practice and participation in our archdiocese. This can describe our SCCs involvement as well.

Happy Thanksgiving Day. In our SCCs Poll on our SCCs Website (<https://smallchristiancommunities.org>) this month -- Seventy-Sixth Round :”The best part of my Small Christian Community is” -- one choice is: “Helps us learn from the Covid-19 pandemic.” One learning is found in the universal saying, *Gratitude is more contagious than any pandemic*. We can be thankful for the many ways that God has helped us during this pandemic. We can be thankful for the many wonderful people, blessings and events in our lives. Let us spread this gratitude, this thankfulness to everyone and to all situations.

Pope Francis's message in Cyprus in December, 2021 is an important heads up to SCC member during the changes happening in this Covid-19 pandemic. "The mission of proclaiming the salvation given by Christ becomes fruitful if it manifests the face of a "patient Church", which "does not allow itself to be upset and disturbed by changes, but serenely welcomes the new and discerns situations in the light of the Gospel".

During an Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI) online Synodal Process gathering in November, 2021 after prayerful reflection we shared with each other the most important change that must occur in the Catholic Church if she is to survive. One answer: "Less emphasis on large parish gatherings and supporting the formation of more Small Christian Communities is a good first step."

"Reading the Sunday Scriptures with a Contemplative Spirit"

Contemplation, according to Walter Burghardt, SJ, means taking a long, loving look at the real. Utilizing the cultures out of which the "Bible" emerges, we will take a contemplative look at the Sunday scriptures to understand them, and to discern how we are called to live them. Join us each Friday from 11:30 am to noon. These sessions are held online, in the Center at Mariandale's Zoom meeting room. All are welcome! Mariandale Retreat and Conference Center, Ossining, New York, USA. This is one type of the emerging weekly online SCCs that are lectionary based faith sharing.

Happy New Year, SCC friends. The 24 Likes and the 12 Comments on our two Facebook Pages shows that we SCC friends have gotten the message about the 1st Sunday of Advent as a Happy New Year time. It is important that SCCs members follow the weekly flow of the Catholic Church's Liturgical Year.

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Let us share African Proverbs on the theme "Synodality/Walking Together:"

"If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together." Burkina Faso proverb

"A friend is someone you share the path with." Sudan Proverb

"The journey of many people does not make one get tired easily."

"The journey of one person is a problem. The journey of two persons together easily gets them to the top of the mountain."

"I am because we are." Zulu South Africa

The road by one person is taken because of nightfall- Kikuyu proverb

From our Skype SCC Gathering today: My takeaway is based on the Seventy-Sixth Round (<https://afriprov.org>) in our voting on "The best part of my Small Christian Community is:.." My answer is "Supportive faith sharing." I am supporting Rita and Belza (and our other SCC members) in their recovery from illness and their commitment to make Jesus Christ the center of their lives.

This material from Lansing Diocese in Michigan, USA on how to improve the quality of our homilies of both priests and deacons is very relevant as priests and deacons are meeting in deanery groups to discuss the 2021-2023 Synodal Process.

From the *2013 Pastoral Plan of Lansing Diocese*, Michigan, USA:

I [the bishop of Lansing]] would like our Department of Formation to provide more opportunities for improving the quality of our homilies for both priests and deacons. In addition, I urge all priests and deacons to become part of some homily preparation session, perhaps with other clergy or with some parishioners, which would meet weekly, or at least regularly, to study, pray over and reflect upon the upcoming Sunday readings.

The *2016 Follow-up Report* stated:

There was a strong push to promote Small Discipleship Groups [similar to Small Christian Communities]. We really cannot be disciples alone. For many, the parish may seem too big, and that can create a sense of anonymity. We need the support, challenge and accountability that small groups can provide in order for us to follow Christ more closely. Thanks be to God, these groups have been sprouting up all across the diocese with reports of many lives changed!" See Lansing Diocese, Michigan, USA Website: DIOCESEOFLANSING.ORG

From our Skype SCC Gathering today: My takeaway is based on the Seventy-Sixth Round (<https://afriprov.org>) in our voting on "The best part of my Small Christian Community is:.." My answer is "Supportive faith sharing." I am supporting Rita and Belza (and our other SCC members) in their recovery from illness and their commitment to make Jesus Christ the center of their lives.

May our SCC members use the concrete symbols of Christmas to enter more deeply in the joy and hope of the season. As Pope Francis says: "[#Christmas](#) symbols, especially the creche and trimmed tree, bring us back to the certainty that fills the heart with peace, with joy for the Incarnation, to God who becomes familiar: He dwells with us, He fills our days with the rhythm of hope."

How can Young Adults participate in the 2021 Synodal Process? Often they are outside of the traditional parish structure and can get lost. One way is through Young Adult Small Christian Communities (YASCCs), but then their experience/insights/views need to be channeled to the right synod networks.

The SCC Model of Church is inductive, from the grassroots and starts with our human experience. So this reflection is important: "Gustavo Gutierrez, Gutiérrez, a Dominican priest now 93, wrote "A Theology of Liberation" after the Second Vatican Council, when much of Catholic theology was moving away from the deductive style of an earlier generation (like the Baltimore Catechism) to an inductive one that took human experience into account. However, there was still something missing. Although the council had done much to recognize people of other faiths and indeed of no faith at all, it only dimly realized the plight of "non-persons" [especially the economic poor] that today still make up the majority population of the planet. Liberation theology challenges all God-talk by placing their experiences [the preferential option of the poor] at the center of reflection."

At lunch today Sister Magdalena Chubwa, CDMT of the Daughters of Mary Religious Congregation from Kigoma, Tanzania said that we already have the Synodal Process in Africa through our African community values and our SCCs. It is easy. It is a "piece of cake."

Magdalena explains further:

In Eastern Africa we already have "Small Christian Communities" well established so it will be very easy during this synodal process when we are trying to collect some information through dialogue. We are already organized from the bottom of the Catholic Church (the family level). Meaning: evangelization in Eastern Africa has been via SCCs, from family to family, house to house and neighbor to neighbor. This I believe is the "Synodal Process" the Pope wants us to do now, that we already have in Eastern Africa. In Eastern Africa we journey together on a daily basis. In other words, we can be a model for this 2021 -- 2024 Synod.

For example, the themes of the Synod: Communion, Participation, and Mission, these three have been exercised for years. A strong unity/communion that is built from the family level to the Local Church will allow people to participate fully during this process of their dialogue where there will openly shared experiences about the mission of the Catholic Church in their ordinary life.

Their daily prayer through Small Christian Communities meetings will play a key role during the Synodal Process in allowing the Holy Spirit to be the center of their discussions. This, in my opinion, is a special opportunity which provides the freedom especially among the lay people communities to share their thoughts and not just those in authority as we are used to seeing.

Therefore, the teams that will lead these sessions on either the parish or diocese levels won't have a problem because people already know what needs to be done.

Pope Francis invites SCC members to practical action when he says: "Let's choose a concrete commitment, however small, that's adapted to our situation in life, and let's continue to do it to prepare ourselves for [#Christmas](#): call a person who is alone, visit that elderly or ill person, do something to serve a poor person, someone in need."

The African Synodality Initiative (a partnership between the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar and the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa) provides resources that will enable the Local Churches in Africa (individuals and groups in dioceses, parishes and Small Christian Communities) to engage fruitfully and constructively in the ongoing Synodal Process. Here is the recording from the first webinar on "Synodality in Africa: Practical Suggestions for Facilitating and Conducting Discussion, Consultation and Dialogue in Local Churches". It is our hope that it will be a useful resource for individuals and groups in dioceses, parishes and Small Christian Communities.

The webinar video is in two parts: Part 1 - Discussion and Part 2 - Question and Answer session.

To watch Part 1 of the webinar video put this link into your browser

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQMextMffv8>

To watch Part 2 of the webinar video put this link into your browser

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IPva4GkfZS0>

From a Major Seminarian in Segerea Senior Seminary, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: “I am happy to participate in the Synodal Process through our Small Christian Communities (SCCs) here in the seminary! It was the wonderful experience! In each small gathering of our SCCs, we start by the invocation of the Holy Spirit, then a short prayer, thereafter we start sharing by hearing from each individual member! The future priests really participated actively.”

From an article in *The Tablet* called "A Synod for the World."

Fundamental to becoming “communities of place” are core practices of prayer and discipleship. Many of us may be unfamiliar with what being in relationship with the Holy Spirit is like. The “cell” group [similar to a SCC] can be the key to this. It is often in small, faithful groups that the Spirit transforms, where people journey together, engage deeply with Scripture and talk honestly about what really matters.

Some commented: “Yes, the Holy Spirit transforms! And yes, it has been my experience that many wonderful learning and deepening experiences take place in small faithful groups.”

Happy New Year 2022 to all SCCs members. We wish you an active year ahead as we continue to journey together in the Synodal Process.

From the 15 January, 2022 issue of *The Tablet*:

Jenny Sinclair writes of “communities of place”, with resonances for me of the early post-Vatican II period. Here in Suffolk, England we had a Franciscan Friary where a series of talks under the title “The Council Comes to You” had been delivered. Not long afterwards we were holding local discussion groups [like SCCs] and having House Masses in different homes weekly. I had read about “Basic Ecclesial Communities” in South America and believed we might be on track for a similar experience. It was not to be, but we did raise our level of participation as church members by forming liturgy groups to choose Mass settings and hymns and by writing the bidding prayers for Sunday Mass. I will look forward to the outcomes that arise from the 2023 Synod.

The Third Sunday in Ordinary Time (23 January, 2022) is Word of God Sunday (Bible Sunday). May our SCCs members listen to the Twitter message of Pope Francis:

@PONTIFEX

The [#Word](#) of God consoles and encourages us. At the same time it summons us to conversion, challenges us, frees us from the bondage of our selfishness. For His Word has the power to change our lives and to lead us out of darkness into the light.

In Gabriel Moran's last book *What Happened to the Roman Catholic Church? What Now?:* The meaning of Vatican II is explored here in a new way and the hope for our church

is, too. This book imagines the church as a community of small communities (described as between eight and 11 people in each).

May Pope Francis' Twitter Message -- "@PONTIFEX: Would that all of us in the Church were what we already are by virtue of baptism: prophets, witnesses, missionaries of the Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit, to the ends of the earth! <https://t.co/513Cd20jvR>" -- inspire all SCC members to reach out to others during this ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

Summary of our Tuesday, 18 January, 2022 St. Isidore Online SCC Gathering as recorded in our Chat Room and posted in our online book on "SCCs in Eastern Africa."

Rita's Chat message: "Today is the Sunday of the WORD OF GOD. Let all of us bear in mind that we are duty bound to PROCLAIM THE GOOD NEWS TO EVERYONE AROUND US by our words and deeds. We are Life Witnesses (*Psalm* 119:105). "Your word is a lamp to GUIDE me a light for my path. SHALOM." Brenda's message on Chat was very supportive: "Thank you all for your continual strength through this online SCC prayer, reflection venue. Even though I am joining in just in this Chat I feel your presence and fellowship in faith. My prayers continue for those SCC members who are having difficulty in their health particularly Belza and Sr. Rita." "Yes, prayers for Belza, Rita and all the sick members of our SCC. As our SCC Poll reminds us we are a "Spiritual Support Community." And Phidelis' comment: "My apologies, my class is extending, I will not be able to join the SCC today. My mantra is *Luke* 4:18." "During our SCC Gathering yesterday we had a full two minutes of silence after the reading of the Gospel. This shows that we were listening to God, not to our selves." Joe's "Takeaway" this week is to encourage Catholics to read and reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday (23 January, 2022) ahead of time. This is a fitting way to celebrate and put into practice the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time as "Word of God Sunday" ("*Bible* Sunday"). Ideally let us read the Gospel before Sunday together: husband and wife, the whole family together, in your weekly SCC. Welcome. The family that reads the *Bible* together stays together." "We are very happy to hear Rita's "Takeway:" "To encourage each Catholic Family to have its own *Bible*-- and to read it. This is so important in our SCCs Model of Church." "Thank you for the rich sharing and the small community spirit today. Oyee."

"The online links are very helpful. God bless you mightily as you serve God's community. I use the online SCCs online Resources during the formation meetings. Let us share our Online SCCs Resources. They are very helpful but I wish our Christians and priests can use these resources for running the SCCs at the local level. For many the cost of internet connectivity is a challenge."

My "Takeaway" this week is to encourage Catholics to read and reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday (23 January, 2022) ahead of time. This is a fitting way to celebrate and put into practice the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time as "Word of God Sunday" ("*Bible* Sunday"). Ideally let us read the Gospel before Sunday together: husband and wife, the whole family together, in your weekly SCC. Welcome.

During the Angelus Pope Francis recalls this year's Week of Prayer for Christian Unity from 18 to 25 January, 2022 and invites everyone to offer up their struggles and suffering in favor of Christian unity.

Silas Isenja, "Align Small Christian Community Programs to the Word of God: Catholic Nun in Kenya," "ACI Africa Online Newsletter," 20 January, 2022, ACI Africa Website, retrieved on 20 January, 2022, Align Small Christian Community Programs to the Word of God: Catholic Nun in Kenya (aciafrica.org)

Go to: https://www.aciafrica.org/news/5123/align-small-christian-community-programs-to-the-word-of-god-catholic-nun-in-kenya?utm_campaign=ACI%20Africa&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=201525317&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8Q45iaohvo_gyvF_WfWbpo23JckFdMQGKjBhyshSy3QoDaV9MxQKNsfh-hq8w8rqsfqoAmPwANXgEA5h2EK1MmlVdZqg&utm_content=201525317&utm_source=hs_email



ACIAFRICA.ORG

Align Small Christian Community Programs to the Word of God: Catholic Nun in Kenya

Three statements from NOVA, an Intentional Eucharistic Community based in Virginia, USA:

1. "Walking together" is only possible if it is based on communal listening to the Word of God.
2. In a synodal style we make decisions through discernment of what the Holy Spirit is saying through our whole community.
3. As Small Communities we actually have relevant experience in getting together in small groups to listen to one another that is the starting point for what the Vatican wants to call a "synodal process".

Pope Francis, for his part, has urged people to carry a small *Bible* or at least a copy of the *New Testament* in their purse or bag -- or download it on their smartphone. And, on occasion, he's had *Bibles* distributed to people who attend the Sunday Angelus. The Jesuit pope continuously encourages people to read at least one passage each day from the Sacred Scriptures. "The Word of God brings us close to God. Let us carry it with us always, in a place where we can remember to open it daily, so that amid all those words that ring in our ears, there may also be a few verses of the [#WordOfGod](#) that can touch our hearts.

Pope Francis message to SCC members and others is loud and clear:

@Pontifex

Let us ask the Lord for the strength to turn off the television and open the "Bible," to turn off our cell phone and open the Gospel. It will make us feel God's closeness to us and fill us with courage as we make our way through life. [#WordOfGod](#)

Two African archbishops' views:

1. Cardinal Antoine Kambanda of Rwanda's Kigali Archdiocese compares Pope Francis's request of listening and being obedient to the Spirit who will inspire the process to the experience during the special diocesan synod on the "ethnic conflict in Rwanda." "We had an experience of listening to the sufferings of the people, we had proposals for mutual understanding and sought solution for reconciliation and peace so that we could match together." Cardinal Kambanda continued, "In this we were guided by the Spirit in prayer and enlightened by the Word of God from the Small Christian Community up to the wider community of the Diocese."

2. The Local Ordinary of the Catholic Archdiocese of Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania Archbishop Ruwa'ichi, disclosed that "the faithful are very enthusiastic about the synod and have received the message as a moment of Grace for the Catholic Church and are more than willing to participate in the synodal process which they see as an opportunity to enrich and re-activate the evangelizing power of the church." He underscores that the people of God are listening to the Holy Spirit "by reciting the Synodal prayer, as well as relating and discussing together about the synodal process and listening to the Holy Spirit who is the supreme mover of the synod." The archbishop has disclosed that the church can borrow a leaf on how to participate in the synodal process from the model of Small Christian Community (SCC) that was established by the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) region with emphasis on "personal relationships, togetherness, family bonds, solidarity, Christian belonging, sharing, working and celebrating together."

<http://communications.amecea.org/.../amecea-african.../>

On this Third Sunday of Ordinary Time that is celebrated as "Word of God Sunday" ("Bible" Sunday), SCC members have a special opportunity to use the maps in a *Bible* (either online maps or printed maps) to identify such towns in Galilee (North Palestine) such as Cana, Nazareth, Capernaum where the stories of Jesus Christ in the Sunday Readings take place. The present day Catholic "Synagogue Church" in Nazareth is built on the ruins of the original Jewish Synagogue where Jesus worshipped.

Folks have trouble accessing our Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website. Depending on which browser you use, enter the words "Small Christian Communities" into the Search Box. You will get different options. Click on the option – "Small Christian Communities" This will take you directly to the "Home Page" of our website. The URL (Website address) is: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org>
Small Christian Communities – Small Christian Communities

During our St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC Gathering today Tuesday, 25 January, 2022 here were some helpful evaluations/comments: "Some SCC members do not read the Gospel before they come to the weekly SCC Gathering. Some animators/facilitators of the weekly Gospel Sharing do not prepare ahead of time. Many Catholics do not read the Gospel before they come to the church in person (physically) on Sunday or before an Internet Zoom Mass on Sunday. If you do not belong to a weekly SCC it is more likely that you do not read the Gospel ahead of time. Various communities read the Gospel of the following Sunday in community on Saturday. It is easier to read a novel than the *Bible*."

Jonathan Hill, MM's reflections on the Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C on the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns Website (Scripture Reflection | Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (maryknollogc.org) begins with a very interesting African story of a young man who opens a "duka" in his village in

Tanzania. Go to:(Scripture Reflection | Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (maryknollogc.org)).

Go to: <https://www.maryknollogc.org/resources/scripture-reflection/fourth-sunday-ordinary-time?fbclid=IwAR0eYY2HhNWx4yH6cm7WJvZHWYXabfnomneyl1D6IRHLbaLUBII8L2ekQ-I>

Announcement of a New Post:

“We Create the Path by Walking Together/Journeying Together: Developing the Synodal Process in Eastern Africa”

By Joseph G. Healey

There is a popular saying in Spanish — *We create the path by walking* – that encourages the growth of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in their local context in Africa from the grassroots up. A Sena (Mozambique) Proverb says: “*Go in that direction*” *does not mean that you go. To go means, “let’s go together!”* The spirit and practice of this saying and this African proverb help us to understand the development of the Synodal Process in the nine countries of AMECEA, namely Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/we-create-the-path.../>

Reports from Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya in East Africa indicate that the Synodal Process is working. The 12 questions in English in the Archdiocesan Questionnaire were first answered in the SCCs, then at the Outstation Level, then at the Parish Level. In February, 2022 the answers will be collated at the Deanery Level and then sent to the Nairobi Archdiocese Level for the Final Synthesis. This follows the principle of decentralization and from the local level/grassroots up.

How can our SCC Model of Church be part of the Synodal Process? One way is help the poorest in society have a voice and to use their voice to deepen or modify Catholic Church life and its expression of faith? Our experience has shown us that speaking out is often a major difficulty for the very poor for many reasons. They find it difficult to express themselves in public. We believe the best solution for freeing their speech is to set up Small Sharing Communities in which they are in the majority, accompanied by "allies" who know them and who are completely available for making it possible for them to express themselves.

“TANZANIA: TEC Secretary General Calls on Small Christian Communities to Become Centers of Christian Witness,” "AMECEA Online Newsletter," 28 January, 2022, retrieved on 29 January, 2022, <http://communications.amecea.org/.../tanzania-tec.../> Excellent article on the history of SCCs in Tanzania and the present regional SCC Workshops/Seminars taking place throughout Tanzania.

SCC members are invited to reflect on the next Sunday readings in a missionary way as a useful tool for ongoing formation and missionary animation. Every Thursday, the meditation on the "Bible" readings for the following Sunday is posted online. Each Mass has in itself a missionary character, since it is the active community witness to the Christian faith of the participants. The link between the mass celebrated and the mission of the Church appears clearly with the final greeting which sounds in the original Latin "*Ite missa est*" (hence the term "mass" for the Eucharistic celebration). At the beginning of each meditation, therefore, the readings planned for the following Sunday are highlighted, together with a

missionary *Bible* commentary divided into three main points and, at the end, some useful ideas for living the Sunday Gospel in a missionary key in daily life.

<https://www.ppoomm.va/.../pum-meditazioni-missionarie.html>

A big challenge is to integrate the SCC Model of Church and African cultural and society values. Two questions have been posed regarding choosing leaders. First, some say that according to African Culture a leader in a SCC has to be married with a family -- a sign of maturity and responsibility in African society. Second, some say that an uncircumcised male member will not be accepted as a leader of a SCC by the other male members who have been circumcised (a sign of adulthood).

During our St. Isidore of Seville International Online Skype SCC Gathering today here are some helpful evaluations/comments: “Some SCC members do not read the Gospel before they come to the weekly SCC Gathering. Some animators/facilitators of the weekly Gospel Sharing do not prepare ahead of time. Many Catholics do not read the Gospel before they come to the church in person (physically) on Sunday or before an Internet Zoom Mass on Sunday. It is easier to read a novel than the *Bible*.”

SCC members can find a amazing variety of rich, searchable online resources for the 2021 -2023 Synod of Bishops at: <https://www.synodresources.org/resources/>

ANNOUNCEMENT:

BUILDING BRIDGES - A Synodal Encounter between Pope Francis and University Students, Thursday, 24 February 2022 (9:00PM Nairobi Time)

This historic encounter between the Pope and university students from North, Central, and South America will address salient challenges of our times. The Pope will dialogue with these university students who will share concrete educational projects that seek to justly transform environmental and economic realities.

To register click the Link:

<https://www.luc.edu/popefrancis/index.shtml>

SCC members can find a variety of online resources for the 2021 – 2023 Synod of Bishops at the AMECEA Website: <http://amecea.org>. Go to the horizontal Index Bar at the top of the Home Page or to More Links at the right side of the Home Page.

You are welcome to vote in the SCCs Poll on the Home Page of our SCCs Website at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/> You can vote every day, but not more than once in a 24 hour period. Some people vote often, but change their votes according to the local context and situation.

May the Synodal Process in Eastern Africa be shared with the universal Catholic Church.

Healey, Joseph, “We Create the Path by Walking Together/Journeying Together: Developing the Synodal Process in Eastern Africa,” Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 31 January, 2022,

<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/we-create-the-path...> journeying-together-developing-the-synodal-process-in-eastern-africa

Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI) Website, “Around the World,” retrieved on 31 January, 2022,

<https://catholicchurchreformintl.org>

AMECEA Online Newsletter, retrieved on 4 February, 2022,

[AMECEA: We Create the Path by Walking Together/Journeying Together: Developing the Synodal Process in Eastern Africa](#)

Some commentators have pointed out that Synodality/the Synodal Process is part of African culture and communal values and that Small Christian Communities have been an expression of synodality for some time in Africa.

In our weekly SCC gatherings we emphasize lectionary-based faith sharing. The ideal is not for each person to share her/his reflection independently following the Silo Syndrome dynamic, but rather to build on/add to what is shared before you. This could be called lectionary-based faith sharing in a synodal style. We move from the traditional small discussion group sharing to a small synodal group sharing.

Catholic Women Theologians, based in Johannesburg, South Africa, in collaboration with the Jesuit Institute is inviting all women who are interested to take part in a zoom meeting to share your experience as a woman in the Catholic Church and to listen to other women share theirs. We will divide into smaller groups for sharing (similar to SCCs) and themes which emerge from the groups will be included in a report on the issue of women in the church. This will be shared by the diocese as a report to the Synod which will meet in Rome in October, 2023.

If you are interested in taking part in this process please register for ONE of the following evenings.

February 16: 6pm-7.30pm

OR

February 24: 6pm-7.30pm

To register email Carol Teichler at c.teichler@jesuitinstitute.org.za.

Feedback: "Thank you for describing your work on preparing the facilitators for the small groups [similar to SCCs] of women. What important work you are doing. They will play such a critical role in creating a safe space (as much as possible) that is able to elicit and honor their experience in the Catholic Church-- what it means to them and where it is present in their lives. And what it needs from its church."

Open Our Hearts

New from RENEW for Lent 2022!

Lent is a time to take stock of where we are on our spiritual journey. It is a moment to check our spiritual bearings and take any action that will keep us moving in the right direction. Take time this Lent 2022 to engage with scripture and reflect on different aspects of your spiritual life with "Open Our Hearts." Look at how you live out your faith at home, in your parish, and in the world. Connect at a deeper level with the Sunday gospels and take time every day to reflect and pray. Each weekly small-group session includes scripture, prayer and reflections along with concrete ways to live out that faith. The book also provides a meditation and reflection question for each weekday of Lent.

\$9.95 Learn More and Buy Now!

<https://store.renewintl.org/.../products/open-our-hearts...>

SCC members can find a variety of online resources for the Synod of Bishops 2021 - 2023 at the AMECEA Website: <http://amecea.org> Go to the horizontal Index Bar at the top of the Home Page or to More Links at the right side of the Home Page.

Several new surveys in the USA refer to “Small Christian Communities.” I am delighted that the expression/term “Small Christian Communities” (or its equivalent in different languages) is becoming more normative in the USA – as it is in the rest of the world. “Small groups” just doesn’t do it for me.”

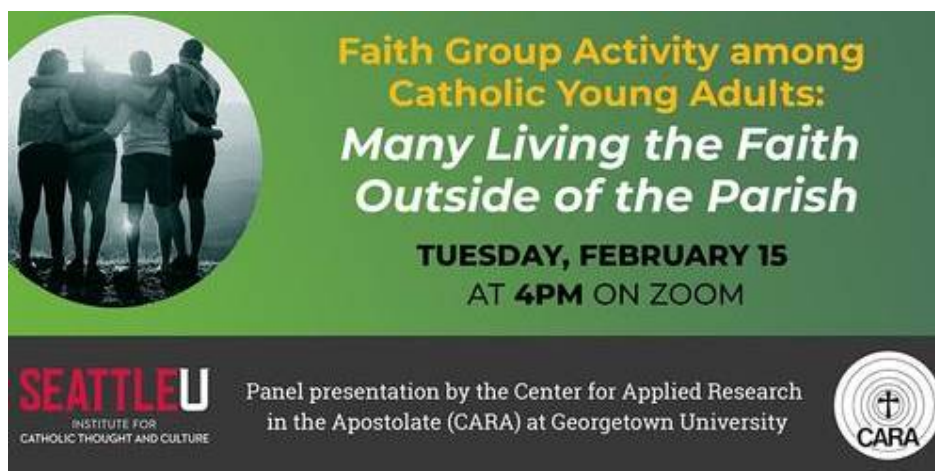
It is interesting compare the name/expression/term for “Small Christian Communities” in different languages and countries of the world. Most notable is the Latin American experience. The official name in Spanish is "Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (CEBs)." The English translation is “Base or Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs).”

At a recent meeting of the National Federation of Catholic Youth Ministry (NFCYM) (<https://nfcym.org>) in Los Angeles, California, USA, the popular terms were Small Faith Sharing Communities and Small Faith Communities on Campus. A key is the use of “community” rather than “group.”

Yes, children can read the Gospel at our weekly SCC gatherings. And they can read well. A Suisse lay woman named Bessi was recently installed by her bishop in the Ministry of Lector (Reader at Mass). She said: "When the pope opened up the ministries, it confirms what I've been doing for years. I have been reading at Mass since I was a child. Technically, it doesn't necessarily change much. But spiritually, it's a fundamental change in my relationship with God, It is above all a service, but it is also a long-term commitment to live by the Word of God and to live by the Eucharist."

I know one Lector in Joliet Diocese in USA who spends 20 minutes of silent reflection on the Scriptures before he reads at Mass. This helps him get into the deeper meaning of the Scripture Text that he is reading. One commentator states: “Yes, this is what we call MEDITATION. I SPEND 30 MINUTES IN SILENCE DAILY.” There are many values in regular silence, contemplation, meditation and reflection.

Listening to the voices of Catholic Young Adults in this Zoom Panel.



Faith Group Activity among Catholic Young Adults:
Many Living the Faith Outside of the Parish

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 15
AT 4PM ON ZOOM

SEATTLE U
INSTITUTE FOR
CATHOLIC THOUGHT AND CULTURE

Panel presentation by the Center for Applied Research
in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University

CARA

[EVENTBRITE.COM](https://www.eventbrite.com)

Special Report: Faith Group Activity among Catholic Young Adults

A good music video to show in a SCC gathering.

The story of the Good Samaritan is constantly being retold and repeated in local settings. The short Scripture DVD music video “Who Is My Neighbor” (5:57 minutes in the “Parables Alive!” Series produced by Paulines Africa Books and Audiovisuals) can be played during a SCC meeting or workshop followed by discussion. This music video retells the classic Good Samaritan story in a contemporary African setting and context. It tells the story of “The Good Muslim” who is a porter at the railway station in Nairobi, Kenya and has a powerful message about overcoming stereotypes and divisions to show love to people who are different from us. This is one of the many contemporary adaptations of the famous Bible parable in an African context.

Paulines Publishers Online Shop (paulinesafrica.org)

<https://e.paulinesafrica.org/index.php/book/bookDetails/428>

AFRICA/ANGOLA - The synodal journey of Small Christian Communities that are open and welcoming.

Speaking of the synodal journey of the Small Christian Communities of Caxitosays Diocese, Angola in which he is serving, Father Luigino Frattin, priest of the Society for African Missions (SMA) says: "In Small Communities Christians strive to walk together every day in co-responsibility and in the commitment to grow in faith and charity, not forgetting anyone. Now it is a question of expanding this synodal spirit, welcoming the newcomers, valuing their gifts, making them feel at ease in an open and welcoming community".

In a recent Zoom Webinar on “Catholic Young Adults and Faith Outside the Parish” there was a lot of discussion on Catholic Young Adults during this Covid-19 pandemic involved in (alphabetically):

"Bible" Study
 Faith groups outside the parish
 Immigrant groups meeting online
 Online faith sharing
 Reading and discussing the "Bible"
 Small Communities Church
 Zoom Faith Sharing Small Communities

but there were no fresh data/statistics on frequency and style of these gatherings.

Pope Francis' Twitter message -- "It is very important to bring together the wisdom of the [#elderly](#) and the enthusiasm of the young. The encounter between grandparents and grandchildren is key, especially in this moment of economic and social crisis that humanity is undergoing" -- is very important for our multi-generational SCCs and a concrete way to bridge the generational gap."

After a break of several weeks due to the long holidays, the Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) of Sao Mateus, in the large eastern suburb of Sao Paulo (Brazil), has resumed its weekly online Wednesday evening discussions on the Synod. But the enthusiasm that was so evident when the process started some months ago, has given way to a certain gloom. Peterson Prates, a 25-year-old participant who is quite involved in the local parish, does not hide his disillusionment. "The first stage of the Synod did not fulfill its promise," he says. "According to the calendar, we should have already handed in our copy to Cardinal Odilo Scherer, our archbishop, in December, 2022. But the phase of listening to the faithful continues until July," the young man says, expressing frustration with the tight deadline. In order not to break its momentum, the small community from Sao Mateus has decided it will continue its discussions and submit the synthesis of its reflections directly to Rome in the summer. Some concrete proposals are trying to emerge within the community. First of all, the younger members are particularly concerned that women should be given more recognition and roles of responsibility in the Church. "The women's diaconate must be at the center of the debate, since we see that Pope Francis wanted to open this reflection," Prates says.

While preparing his Homily for Sunday Mass, a Permanent Deacon had this cryptic, but insight comment: "Always best to talk to Him [Jesus Christ] about them [the parish congregation] before I talk to them about Him." This is also good advice for the facilitator of the weekly SCCs gathering. Spiritually prepare ahead of time and ask Jesus Christ for inspiration and guidance.

From Anna Johnson: In our Young Adult Listening Session in Seattle, Washington, USA that we held last night, one young adult said, "My faith comes alive in small groups [like SCCs]. Whenever I get fed up with the Institutional Church, and want to leave, it's my experiences with small groups (like our Maryknoll Young Adult Empowerment Community) and accompaniment that keeps me in it." As the session was ending, another young adult said, "This was the most holy gathering I've experienced lately."

Language is important. There are important distinctions in the Catholic Church worldwide. Popular in Latin America is the expression Base Communities (BCs) or *Comunidades de Base*

(CBs) in Spanish that are small neighborhood communities that meet weekly for prayer, Bible Reflection and action.

Sometimes written as:

In Spanish: *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEBs). Translated as Base Ecclesial Communities (BECs). Sometimes translated as Ecclesial Base Communities (EBCs).

In Portuguese-speaking Brazil: *Comunidades Eclesiais de Base* (CEBs).

In French: *Communautés Ecclésiales de Base* (CEBs) or simply Communautés de Base (CBs).

Also *Petites Communautés Chrétiennes* (PCCs).

Worldwide there are literally over 5,000 names/terms/expressions. Now more and more the name Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is the umbrella term and the most common name worldwide. It is widely used in Africa.

In general the *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEBs) in Latin America have a social action focus while the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa have a pastoral focus.

Today I joined the John Paul II Evangelization Team/John Paul II Evangelizers based in Nairobi, Kenya in their monthly online gathering. We used Google Meet that is similar to Zoom, but does not have a time limit. We used the Seven Steps in the Synodal Process. A key insight was that before Covid-19 the team used a variety of evangelization methods such as street preaching, one-on-one visits, public rallies and monthly evangelization meetings that sometimes using a SCC model. Now a whole new world has opened up – digital/online/virtual evangelization. Through social media platforms they can reach many more people, especially young people, in a new way.

This Zoom Webinar show that 60% of Catholic Young Adults' Faith Community Activities are outside the parish. This motivated me to revisit the book chapter: Joseph Healey, "What Catholic Young People Really Want to Talk About?" in Kevin Ahern and Christopher Derige Malano, (eds.), *God's Quad: Small Faith Communities on Campus and Beyond Maryknoll*, NY: Orbis Books, 2018. The chapter can be found online on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at: http://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../what_catholic.pdf

Of the seven Case Studies of "Listening Sessions By and For Young People" the venues are: 2 - universities; 2 - high school; 1 - parish ; 1 - SCC; and 1 -- Young People Community Center. So six out of the seven venues are outside the parish property/grounds.

Surprise. On behalf of our AMECEA Small Christian Communities Training Team I sent some material to the Synod Office in Vatican City, and lo and behold they posted it as follows:

Under "Sharing Synod Resources" https://www.synodresources.org/resource_post/241020/ of the 2021-2023 Synodal Process on the Synod of Bishops Website at the Vatican:

The [Small Christian Communities] Website and the [Small Christian Communities] Facebook profile are two communication projects developed by AMECEA – Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa.

Under the coordination of the Pastoral Department, they are called Small Christian Communities because they are spaces where all the local communities of the member countries share their celebrations, events, experiences, ideas, and reflections, now with emphasis on the synodal process.

The website publishes occasional articles, local news, a calendar of events, a photo gallery, among other formation tools. The Facebook profile is based on the same principle of a forum to develop the synodal process in Africa.

AMECEA is a service organization for the National [Catholic] 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 page includes a photograph of African elephants together that uses the famous Burkina Faso proverb: *If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together.*



SYNODRESOURCES.ORG

Website: Small Christian communities united in a global collaborative website - Sharing synodal resources

It shows that someone in Rome went into our

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website

<https://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/www.smallchristiancommunities.org>

and studied the specific features. Unfortunately the Synod Page did not include the hyperlinks. But as they say, *a half a loaf is better than none.*

SCC members can pray for, and act on, how we are all missionary disciples following the vision of Pope Francis who says, “Dream big! And dream together.”

Dear SCC friends,

SCC POLL ANNOUNCEMENT: It is important that we continue to evaluate our SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa so we can make it better. Please vote in the current polls.

Seventy-Eighth Round: (March, 2022 – April, 2022):

The best part of my Small Christian Community is:

- a) Powerful way to accompany one another as pilgrims on the journey.
- b) In solidarity with Covid-19 sufferers and their caregivers.
- c) Helps other people.
- d) True experience of Synodality in Africa.
- e) Zoom Small Faith Community.
- f) Empowers the church in the neighborhood.

To vote at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>

Each of these six choices comes from SCC members themselves and provides an insight into our SCCs Model of Church today. What strikes me is they show the relevancy of SCCs for today's world: Covid-19; Synodality in Africa; and Zoom. A SCC member could make a prayerful meditation on each of these six choices.

From Bishop Richard Baawobr, MAfr, the Bishop of Wa Diocese, Ghana: I find papers like "New Learnings in Animating a Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church in Africa Today" inspiring. Keep it up. I am trying my best in Wa Diocese to promote SCCs.

When Baawobr was asked what are the main obstacles to the growth of SCCs in Ghana, he gave this excellent analysis: "I think clericalism is one of the main obstacles. Some priests cannot see themselves not leading. The other thing might be the many associations that take up too much time and money of people. Also Church Leaders see the SCCs as another Society/Association instead of the way of Church." This is a very insightful analysis of SCCs not only in Ghana but also in Nigeria.

Paul Miapkwap of the Catholic Diocese of Shendam, Plateau State, Nigeria: "Professor Paul Steffen moderated my thesis in Rome on "The Formation of Small Christian Communities as a Model for Evangelization in Shendam Diocese, Nigeria." I came back to Nigeria and I am the Director of the Catechetical Training Institute in Shendam. I have introduced Small Christian Community in the school. Our students are divided into five Small Christian Communities and it is really yielding fruit.

We are using generous gifts of friends and benefactors to help the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Kenya to promote the two year 2021-2023 Synodal Process in Kenya – so dear to the heart of Pope Francis. In Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya a 12 question questionnaire on "Synodality" was sent to all the parishes. Individual SCCs that I am working with, like St. Kizito SCC in St. Austin's Parish, have already discerned and answered the questions and sent the answers to the parish that has compiled the answers and sent them on the Deanery Level. Next is the Archdiocesan Level. After further gatherings and discernment, the final synthesis will be sent to the Vatican. Meanwhile different Synodal Activities are taking place like Zoom Webinars and In-person gatherings using the Synodal Process. Helping the needy is a special outreach of this Lenten Season. So thanks be to God we are not just talking the talk, but we are walking the walk. May the Holy Spirit guide us.

Mwanajumuiya Alphonse Omolo reports on SCC training in St. Monica Parish, Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya:

The training started at the sub-parish levels. St. Monica has 5 sub-parishes (St. Augustine - Renja, St. Charles Lwanga - Nyamasaria, St. Ambrose - Nyamasaria, St. Anthony - Ragumo, St. Stephen Ofunyu) located within the parish jurisdiction. The sub-parishes have between 6 and 12 SCCs each. As usual, some SCCs are active and others inactive. About 150 leaders were trained.

My key learning during this process is that the Christians know very little about what SCCs, what they should do in the SCCs and more especially the centrality of the Word of God in the SCCs. The idea that it is in the SCCs where the members bounce their FAITH experience and LIVED experience over each other sounded quite unique to them. And that they engage in interpreting faith and interpreting life experience and keeping them in conversation with each other. They later thought that the reason why some of their members are inactive is because they know very little about what should be done in a SCC.

So at the sub-parishes we went through What is SCC (I have improved the content and input based on our experience at Loyola Institute for Ministry) and Leadership Skills in SCCs. This is a 'crash' training which involves delivering contextualised content. It involves analysis of the local context through talk with the Parish Priest and a few PPC members.

I used my experience and analysis of the gaps during the sub-parishes training to develop the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) level training content. This worked perfectly well. The parish council level training included the strengthening of the critical aspects of the SCCs and the role of the PPC in the parish strategic direction. Members got an introduction to developing a parish strategic plan. The content included: Conversation as the root symbol of the SCCs (the role of language and handling challenges of ethnic dialects in SCC meetings); Two basic qualities of SCCs (that SCCs are Gathered/inner life and are Sent/public or social life); Questions SCCs face (what is the major focus of the SCCs, how are the behaviour of the members evaluated etc.); Understanding the parish (what is a parish?, etc.); Roles of leaders in a parish; Roles of PPC in leadership transition; Parish strategic planning; Roles of PPC in the parish strategic direction.

I left the sub-parish leaders' copies of printed slides that they may photocopy and distribute to the members. I also gave the participants who have email addresses the pdf copy of the training slides for onward use. They also got a copy of steps for conducting a "Bible" sharing in SCCs gathering.

I have received several feedback emails from the leaders at the sub-parishes and parish levels. Most of them have indicated that they have started implementing the outcome of the training and they are realising positive improvements amongst the members of the SCCs.

It has been such a great learning experience for me. I enjoyed developing the content for the parish level training after finalising the training at the sub-parishes.

The parish priest, Fr. Joseph (Augustinian) attended and actively participated in all the training at the sub-parishes and the parish level. One can see the commitment the leaders and the Parish Priest had placed in this training.

One type of SCC are the Maryknoll Affiliates Chapters around the world. Here is a reflection by one member:

Unlike many Affiliates and Catholics, I was received into the Church as an 18-year-old, while a student at a Catholic university. I was looking for meaning, a direction in life, as young people still do. The decision shaped and filled my life. Now I am an old man and I am finding that same meaning and feeling in Pope Francis' call for the current synod and vision of synodality. Reminiscent of my college days, when many Catholics were unaware of the social doctrines of the Church and its place in the world as described by Vatican II, many Catholics today in the US are unaware of the Synod. Have you heard about it?

The Vatican Office for the Synod, the USCCB, diocesan materials, and parish bulletins are using the Jesuit educational approach—begin with definitions (something I found useful as a college student). Here is one definition of Synodality:

syn = “together” hodos = “road”
synod = “on the road together”

Synodality is a style or mode of being Church, in which we journey together, both clergy and laity, each according to our roles and spiritual gifts.

The intention of this process is “to inspire people to dream about the Church we are called to be, to make hopes flourish, to stimulate trust, to bind up wounds, to weave new and deeper relationships, to learn from one another, to build bridges, to enlighten minds, warm hearts and restore strength to our hands for our common mission.”

What do Affiliates have to do with the Synod? For me, it's as basic as the Affiliates being a voice in the Catholic Church. This is an opportunity to initiate doing Church differently, something clearly expressed at Vatican II—as the People of God and all people of goodwill. As Father Greg Boyle points out in his new book, *The Whole Language*, that goodness is present in every human being. Affiliates are called to expose that goodness and bring it forward to the world, as Maryknollers have always done. We will have opportunities to express the Affiliate experience and vision in this process, which hopefully will not end in 2023. It seems to me Maryknoll pillars of spirituality, community, global vision, and action are quite in sync with Pope Francis' call to communion, participation, and mission.

From our research a book club is certainly a type of small group, and it can be a type of SCC. Last night I participated in a virtual Orbis Book Club via Zoom. One hour. 12 participants. Four Break-out Groups. We reflected on and discussed the Preface and Chapter 1 of the Orbis Book *Racial Justice and the Catholic Church* by Father Bryan N. Massingale, a Black Catholic priest who teaches at Fordham University. Good analysis of the racial situation and white privilege in the United States and in the Institutional Catholic Church. Implications of the Black Lives Matter Movement today. Personal faith sharing. Both in-person and virtual Book Clubs are popular these days.



Christ the Teacher Parish-Kenyatta University – Just another WordPress site
The Catholic community at Kenyatta University – a public institution is privileged to have a Chaplain. The KU management has appointed chaplaincies to support the academic, moral and social formation of the students.

kucatholic.or.ke

Congratulations to the Kenyatta University Catholic Chaplaincy web team for keeping the parish website very updated. Kudos! <http://www.kucatholic.or.ke/>

It is encouraging that the SCCs at Kenyatta University are doing well. The Alumni Zoom SCC has many members– from all over the world. The on-campus SCCs each have a representative/contact person on the web team.

In St. Austin's Parish, Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya during Lent the 5 pm liturgy of the “Way of the Cross” is led by the SCCs. This year the leaders are the members of St. Padri Pio SCC.

We are happy to announce that a revised, updated .pdf version of our free, online Ebook Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa” is posted under “Ebooks” on our SCC website at: Microsoft Word - 11 March 2022 version of Building the Church as Family of God (smallchristiancommunities.org).

It is also available in Two Parts for those who have difficulty in internet connectivity. This “Fourth Edition” (19 chapters, 1,266 pages, 1,503 footnotes) will published as a Ebook and Print on Demand paperback in two volumes on the Amazon Website in May 2022. This edition includes Case Studies and experiences during the Covid-19 pandemic from March, 2020 to the present and during the 2021--2023 Synod of Bishops. Microsoft Word - 11 March 2022 version of Building the Church as Family of God (smallchristiancommunities.org)

Someone responded to this post by using the saying *Iende Mbele Injili* that means "Let the Word of God Go Forth" in Swahili. It is also the name of a Swahili clapping song that is used during our "Bible" Processions in Eastern Africa.

May our SCC members listen well to:

"African Theologians Advocate for Adoption of African Values in Synod on Synodality"

Participants in the ongoing Synod on Synodality symposium of Theologians that was organized by the Jesuit Conference of Africa and Madagascar (JCAM) in collaboration with the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) suggest that the Synodal Process be anchored in African values.

The team of theologians who were selected to represent various segments of the Church in Africa suggested that as the people of God journey together in the Synodal process, they need to readopt such African values as care for each other, care for the environment and other helpful values.

Africans always believed that they were each other's relatives and they lived in solidarity with each other, caring for the unborn, the living and the living dead. They also cared deeply about the environment. These are the values we need to think about.

There is a need to reclaim and share our Africa values of communitarian relationship, hospitality, respect for family and human life especially the young and old and relatedness with all of creation. We need reference to God and to our ancestors.

https://www.aciafrica.org/news/5422/african-theologians-advocate-for-adoption-of-african-values-in-synod-on-synodality?utm_campaign=ACI%20Africa&utm_medium=email&hsmi=206495833&hsc=p2ANqtz-8kipYtZeKokd0NvHjcj67juyJdbIAxrskBRlvA3zTJQuqw1WbxcqjvO_a6HK2FR26VdKSah0jHOZOIDoUI177SVLIyqA&utm_content=206495833&utm_source=hs_email

In evaluating various Synod Listening Sessions around the world the Institutional Catholic Church does not seem to offer "safe spaces" for LGBTQ young adults, the homeless and people who have left the church. Thus Pope Francis is encouraging those on the margins to lift their voices. We are encouraged to be creative in doing one-on-one Synod Listening Sessions -- meeting at a coffee shop, in a person's home, on the phone, in a ZOOM Chat or a walk in the park.

From "Agenda Development for Synodality." Which are the most important reform issues for you?

Question 17. OTHER Please outline any other issue that you feel should be the subject of synodal discussion.

Importance of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as an official pastoral and social action structure of the Catholic Church. NOTE: in your question you use the term "synodal discussion." This is inaccurate. It should be "synodal discernment." Thanks.

As we emphasize the importance of "Synodality" and the "Synodal Process" in the Catholic Church today, we go back to the the starting point in the AMECEA Region: 24 November, 1973 to 24 August, 1975 when Bishop Patrick Kalilombe held a Mini-Synod in Lilongwe Diocese, Malawi. In 1973 he wrote his first Pastoral Letter for Lilongwe Diocese entitled "Christ's Church in Lilongwe, Today and Tomorrow: Our Diocesan Pastoral Planning Project." He was the first bishop in Eastern Africa to start a diocesan pastoral plan of Small Christian Communities on the grassroots level.

This historical research is very enlightening. Its shows that already in the original five AMECEA countries – Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia – experiences of SCCs on the grassroots existed in both rural and urban areas before the famous AMECEA Study Conference on "Planning for the Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s" in Nairobi, Kenya in December, 1973. The AMECEA Bishops were known for being pastoral minded and interested in grassroots evangelization. So they had a pastoral sense and concrete pastoral priorities as they entered this meeting in 1973 to plan for the future.

The starting dates of SCCs:

1966: Tanzania

1969: Zambia
 1970: Kenya
 1972: Malawi
 1972: Uganda

Various Zoom gatherings on "Synodality" recommend to engage Young People through base communities. Go where the Young People are at:

1. Social Media Platforms.
2. Social action projects.
3. Causes such as racial justice and climate justice.

How to apply our SCC Model of Church to our 40 day Lenten Season: Practice and observe the Season of Lent as small community members journeying together:

African Proverb: "Go in that direction" does not mean that you go. To go means, "let's go together!" Sena (Mozambique) Proverb

Choice in SCCs Poll (<https://smallchristiancommunities.org>): "Powerful way to accompany one another as pilgrims on the [Lenten] journey."

There is a saying *the medium is the message*. The Editorial in the *Osservatore Romano* says that the priority of evangelization and the role of the laity are the primary ideas that connect the new *Apostolic Constitution* governing the Roman Curia with the Second Vatican Council. Yet at the Press Conference the three presenters were a Cardinal, a Bishop and a Priest. All clerics wearing clerical clothes. All men. What message does this communicate to lay people, to women, to SCCs members?

Some feedback:

- That's the naked truth.
- Hierarchy.
- Difficult to give up [power/control].
- Food for thought. Old habits die hard.
- Change, renewal and reform in the Catholic Church is hard, but necessary.
- A clear missed opportunity. The Vatican still does not get it.

The new apostolic constitution, *Praedicate Evangelium* ("Preach the Gospel" in Latin) that reforms the structure of the Roman Curia emphasizes the importance of popular piety/popular religiosity/devotional Catholicism around the world. We are reminded that St. Kizito SCC and other SCCs in St Austin's Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya are actively involved in devotions such as the Rosary and the Stations of the Cross that are prayed communally or in community (*kijumuiya* in Swahili).

Trend in reports from Synodal Sessions: "While some participants shared a very positive experience with their local parish, others instead find their primary faith community in self-organized small groups [communities] of people who are disenchanted with their local parishes and bishops."

The SCC Model is found in many Campus Ministry programs. The campus ministry team at the local university in Puno, Peru is organizing virtual listening sessions for the university students on the "Synodal Process." Questions include:

1. "How do you find the Catholic Church -- Campus Ministry, Parish, Diocese?"
2. "Do you have suggestions for changes?"
3. "If you had five minutes alone with Pope Francis what would you share with him/ask him?"

The results of these sessions will be sent to the Synod Office in Rome.

Faith Circles are faith sharing small groups [communities] aimed at bringing people together to share their lives and the ways in which Jesus is working in them through his Holy Spirit. Whether through participating in Alpha, Lenten or Advent groups, people have realised the joy and fruitfulness of journeying in faith with people they have come to know, love and trust. All the evidence shows that living and growing in our faith is best done as part of a small group [community]-- turning rows into circles! For more info go to:

<https://www.dow.org.au/media-resources/faith-circles/>

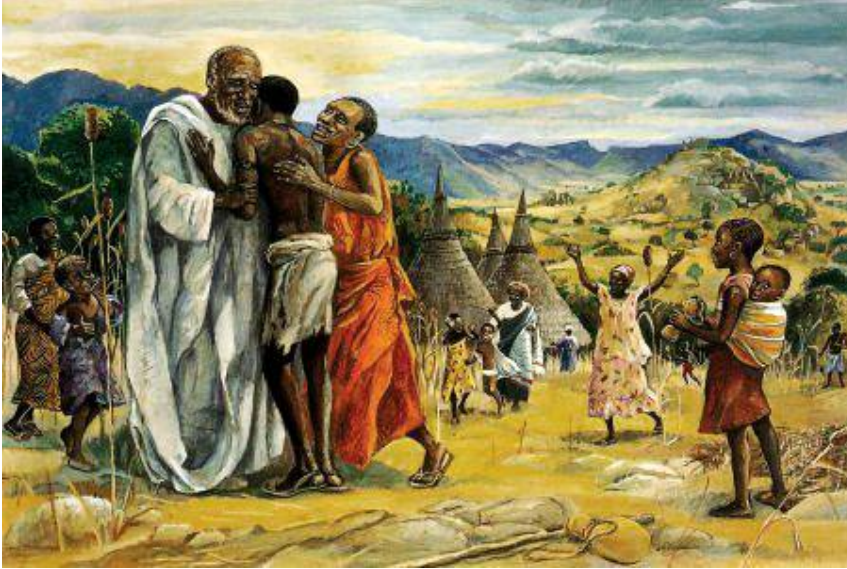
The University of Ave Maria in Florida, USA has 13 Faith Households (eight households for women and five households for men) that are officially recognized by the University. A Faith Household is a group of male or female students who mutually support each other by spending time together in prayer and recreation. These Christ-centered groups strive for balanced, healthy, interpersonal relationships while they support and challenge a member to develop spiritually, emotionally, academically, and physically.

St. Paul Outreach (SPO) based in Minnesota, USA has 45 Faith Households on college campuses nationwide. At the heart of SPO life and mission are staff and students living and evangelizing together.

In our SCC Gospel Sharing gatherings, in our homilies, sermons and talks and in our 2022 Lenten Spiritual Journey let us walk together as we learn from African Reading of the Gospel of St. Luke (4th Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B) about the "Parable of the Prodigal Family" described as follows:

African religious/Biblical art is an important part of inculturation and symbolic theology. It is included in EResources and Archives on our website.

In the Biblical parable of the Prodigal Son, a son receives his inheritance and travels to a distant country, wastes all his money in wild extravagance, becomes desperately poor, returns to his father, and is received with open arms. Prodigal, here and elsewhere, means "rashly or wastefully extravagant". The word "prodigal" does not mean "wayward" but, according to *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, "recklessly spendthrift." It means to spend until you have nothing left. This term is therefore as appropriate for describing the father and the whole family in the story as well as his younger son. Thus the Jesus Mafa painting from Cameroun portrays "The Prodigal Family."



Father Aarockia Dhas Rayappan, a priest of Delhi Archdiocese, India and a Ph.D. Student at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada is doing a Reading Research Seminar on the "History of the Small Christian Communities." These comparative studies are very significant and show key trends. It is important that the SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa get better known. We grew and developed independent of Latin America and Asia. We have recently updated our Ebook on "Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa" with a large chapter on the SCCs history. Some of our PDF resources on SCCs from our SCCs Website will be used in this research seminar.

One SCC Model of Church is the House Meeting. We help individual parishes to reach out to those voices on the margins in House Meetings that are small informal group settings in private homes. The House Meetings have become a way for people to engage others. They're oriented to be very relational. People are getting to know each other in a different way. You can prompt people and ask them who do they know, who they'd like to engage in a conversation like this and if they would be willing to bring people together. The House Meeting can be a tool to search for people, so it doesn't have to be a one-time effort.

May all SCC members' prayers join Pope Francis's heartfelt plea: "Every war worsens everyone's situation. Therefore, I renew my appeal: Enough. Stop it. Silence the weapons. Move seriously toward peace!" The 22 comments included:

1. Prayers for peace in Ukraine is an important part of the "Prayers of the Faithful" in every SCC gathering these days.
2. Praying.
3. In the mighty name of our LORD JESUS CHRIST.
4. I love the Pope's prayers!

Every Mon night at 7:30, one dozen faith filled women meet in our chapel in a small faith-sharing group. We read the scripture for next Sunday, break open the word, hear a reflection and share how it connects to our daily lives. INSPIRATIONAL!!

This Facebook Page is a online forum/"virtual place" for exchanging SCC ideas and SCC experiences. With "Synodal Listening Sessions" going on around the world there is growing interest in active lay participation in the Catholic Church. Some small communities are being formed (in person, hybrid and online) that read the Gospel of the following Sunday and connect it to our daily lives. Some times the pastor/and/or his assistant participate to get ideas for their Sunday homilies. A good experience of synodality, walking on the synodal path. Examples are welcome.

SCCs Poll: The question -- "The best part of my Small Christian Community is... " followed by six choices: The total number of choices to draw from is 1581:

781: Dynamics

800: Activities

As an important footnote to AMECEA history the first historic synod in Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi in 1972 was called in Chewa, the local Malawian language, "*Mpingo Ndife Tonse*." This is when Bishop Patrick Kalilombe was the first bishop in Eastern Africa to start a diocesan pastoral plan of Small Christian Communities on the grassroots level. The second diocesan synod was called "*Tiyende Limodzi*." Now Archbishop George Desmond Tambala has started a third synod in Lilongwe Archdiocese from March 2022 to August 2023. He states: "We want to take advantage of the Synod [on Synodality) that is happening globally so that we can as well isolate some issues that are very relevant for our Local Church and find possible solutions which will give a better direction to our archdiocese." In the spirit of the *Acts of the Apostles* he said: "It is only when we do things together that we can say we and the Holy Spirit have decided." Again we honor Marehemu (Deceased) Patrick Kalilombe for being ahead of time in 1972.

Mwirabi Sise's Report from Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: "We have six SCCs and together have a formed a zone. My wife Sophia is the Zonal Chairperson for all 6 SCCs. We all meet regularly on the first Saturday of the month. In our regular SCC we meet every Saturday from 6.30 to 08.00 am and pray together and plan for the next SCC meeting. Normally this is where all those who want to baptize their kids, marriage, etc are discussed."

Happy Feast Day of St. Isidore of Seville -- 4 April, 2022. Doctor of the Church. Prolific writer. Initially a poor student, he gave the problem over to God and become of the most learned men of his time. He died in Seville, Spain on 4 April. 636. He became the leading candidate for Patron of Computer Users and the internet in 1999. It is suggested that we pray to St. Isidore before logging onto the internet. One prayer includes the line: "We beseech you that, through the intercession of Saint Isidore, bishop and doctor, during our journeys through the internet we will direct our hands and eyes only to that which is pleasing to you and treat with charity and patience all those souls whom we encounter."

The diocesan directors of the Pontifical Mission Societies in the Netherlands, together with Father Dinh Anh Nhue Nguyen OFM, Secretary General of the Pontifical Missionary Union, addressed the loneliness of Catholics and the difficulties encountered by younger generations in speaking the language of the Church. "There are no easy answers or solutions", said Father Anh Nhue Nguyen, "I dream of a new missionary movement in Europe, including the Netherlands, where we will start with small communities guided by the Holy Spirit". A mission, therefore, which restarts from its origins and which is as vital as breathing, which is the "essence of everyday life".

St. Paul Outreach (SPO) establishes Young Adult Communities in cities, connected to our college chapters:

- A community of young adults, many of whom are alumni of a nearby SPO college chapter, led by SPO staff, young adult volunteers, and couples.
- Living a common way of life together, similar to that of an SPO college formation community, growing together to maturity and launching into vocation.
- Engaging formal formation elements: worship, courses, small groups, and pastoral care.
- Bridging with and serving local college chapters, especially their formation programs.
- Varying degrees of organized outreach to other young adults.
- Young adult communities can develop into and/or partner with long-term communities such as covenant communities.

For further discernment:

In a webinar on "The Church in Africa on the Synodal Path: Living Synodality in Local Churches" on 30 March 2022, Cardinal Mario Grech was asked the question: "How can we increase the participation of lay people in the Synodal Process?" He answered that several Canon Lawyers attached to the Theological Commission of the "Synod on Synodality" Office in Rome are presently studying how to change Canon Law to make Parish Pastoral Councils "compulsory" (his word) or required/mandatory rather than just "recommended." This has many implications for the membership, activities and powers of Parish Pastoral Councils around the world. In Eastern Africa Parish Pastoral Councils are formed from below – with representatives of the neighborhood Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and others.

Explanation of "Parish Pastoral Councils and SCCs" in my free, online Ebook on "Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa":

Then came the historic Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are not specifically mentioned in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, but are clearly implied. The traditional geographical parish is considered the basic juridical unit of the Catholic Church so there is no mention of subparishes, outstations, chapels and SCCs, that is, nothing "smaller" or "lower" than the parish. The same applies to the revised "1983 Code of Canon Law." While SCCs are not specifically mentioned in the code, they are indirectly referred to in the section on "Structures" under the "People of God." The Particular Churches (Local Churches) have the freedom to carry out pastoral work in parishes on the local level following their own structures and activities. This is described as the "ordering of the parish on the most local levels."

One of these structures is SCCs. In the SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa (the nine AMECEA countries) the SCC is an official ecclesial structure in the parish. The SCCs officially participate in the parish leadership structures.

Each SCC (or a group of SCCs) has a representative on the Outstation, Subparish or Parish Pastoral Council. Elections start at the level of SCCs and move upwards. This insures that the Parish Pastoral Council leaders are chosen from those lay people who are already leaders in their SCCs – thus true representation from below.

Small Christian Communities developed as a result of putting the communion ecclesiology and teachings of Vatican II into practice. Small Christian Communities make real the vision of Vatican II that calls on the Church to be (shine forth as) “a people made one with the unity (brought into unity) from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (No. 4 of *Lumen Gentium*, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church of the Church).

When American theologian Father Bernard Lee, SM visited Kenya he said that this systematic pastoral plan and leadership structure from below was the most significant feature of SCCs in Eastern Africa. SCCs as an official ecclesial structure in the parish was the central point in a briefing for German theologians from Missio, Aachen and the University of Münster at Tangaza University College on 7 March, 2014.

American theologian Brad Hinze writes:

"This is an excellent formulation of one of your most important findings from all of your field work. Both my 2006 book on *Practices of Dialogue in the Church* and my 2016 book, *Prophetic Obedience*, gave a great deal of attention to a range of communal processes of group discernment and decision making. I gave special attention to parish pastoral councils, synods of bishops, and the role of individuals from communities of women religious in teaching bishops and priests how to engage in communal processes of discernment. There is evidence, at least among the Jesuits, that the religious communities of men struggled with communal discernment since the council.

Christian Life Communities (CLCs) remained and remains important for me throughout my time of writing about these various synodal and communal processes, and I thanked my own Small Christian Community in my introductions. But I never described them in my books and I never theologially theorized about them and their role in the church. This is what is important about your intervention. Massimo Faggioli's writings on new ecclesial movements did not sufficiently address the deeper intertwining relationship between various forms of SCCs and ecclesial movements and structured forms of group discernment within church structures.

You are drawing attention to that, especially as it is occurring in Eastern Africa. Others in Latin America have done this before but it merits much more attention. However, what also invites scrutiny is the fact that for various reasons some find it spiritually and existentially difficult to participate in the celebration of the Eucharist -- for example, because of the lack of active and prophetic witnesses of women in the celebration of the Eucharist, the failure to welcome and reach out to marginalized communities, the failure to address social justice (poverty, racial injustice, neocolonialism, and ecological crises) issues as intimately connected to life issues. Some of these people who are frustrated with the limitations and failures of parishes and dioceses either leave the church entirely or participate in alternative Christian communities rather than join other

Christian Churches. The failure to practice synodal forms of discernment in parishes and dioceses is driving some away to these types of SCCs. This need not be the case as you indicate, but it does merit more attention and honest discussion.⁵³¹

Walking together/journeying together is the DNA of SCCs: In No. 33 of *The Joy of the Gospel* Pope Francis says:

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

The famous Burkina Faso proverb says: *If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together.*

The Swahili book *Kuimarisha Ukuaji wa Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo za Kikristo Katika Afrika* (2022) is available from the Paulines Publications Africa and the AMECEA Office in Nairobi.

1. 134-page booklet to assist in SCCs training courses for SCCs facilitators and animators in Africa.
2. Preface by H. E. Souraphiel Cardinal Berhaneyesus, Archbishop of Addis Ababa Archdiocese, Ethiopia and former Chairman of AMECEA.
3. Recommends 15 topics and sessions for an effective training course on this key pastoral priority of the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa. They include: arrival of the participants, introduction of the participants, logistics, sharing of roles and responsibilities, participant's fears or concerns, training topics, expectations and training objectives.
4. Includes a rich bibliography that comprises references, additional reading materials, videos, DVDs as well as accompanying rich annexes. The new handbook recommends a checklist of 16 common activities in Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa today for effective training of SCCs facilitators.

Pope Francis' Twitter message for Easter is a powerful challenge to all SCC members: "Jesus is alive! Today, too, he walks in our midst, changes us and sets us free. Thanks to him, evil has been robbed of its power; failure can no longer hold us back from starting anew; and death has become a passage to the stirrings of new life."

A typical response comes from a priest in Boston, Massachusetts, USA: "Last night I attended my local parish's discussion on "Synodality." Youth were totally absent." We have to break this reoccurring pattern. I still hope that inviting young adults to their own peer-group synodal sessions outside the parish compound (online, social media, in a bar, restaurant, community center, mall, park) can be one of the practical solutions.

⁵³¹ Brad Hinze, email message to the author, 11 April, 2022..

Research on the effectiveness of the "Synodal Process" in recent SCC gatherings and Parish Pastoral Council gatherings in both the USA and Kenya indicates that Catholics continue to go back to/revert to the traditional small discussion group style rather than the small discernment community style (that involves deeper listening, even contemplation, and responding to/building on to what previous participants have shared).

From Father Mike Bassano, MM:

Every Thursday at 5 pm in our Catholic Church in the UN camp for people displaced by war in Malakal, South Sudan there is a meeting of our Liturgy Committee that is a type of SCC. Members prepare for the Sunday liturgy by reflecting on the Scripture Readings and then sharing their thoughts about what the Word of God is saying to them. It is basically like a weekly Small Christian Community gathering to discover what the message of God is for each Sunday liturgy.

I usually start preparing my own homily on Sunday night. Throughout the week my thoughts are also on what the Word of God is saying to me for the following Sunday liturgy. On Thursday when participating in the Liturgy Committee gathering, our people give me more input from their personal and communal sharing that helps me to know what the homily theme will be about. It is always a wonderful experience to share the Word of God as we grow together as a Christian community.

Dear SCC friends,

SCC POLL ANNOUNCEMENT: It is important that we continue to evaluate our SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa so we can make it better. Please vote in the current polls, May-June 2022.

Seventy-Ninth Round: (May, 2022 – June, 2022):

The best part of my Small Christian Community is:

- a) Focus on the Word of God (Bible).
- b) Thanksgiving for getting back to nearer normal.
- c) Praying together for peace in the world.
- d) Unique opportunity to use the Synodal Process.
- e) Online practice of our faith.
- f) Source of comfort to the lay faithful.

To vote at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>

I wonder if folks know that some of the best university student SCCs in the USA are found at St Thomas More: Catholic Chapel and Center at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, USA..

Small Church Communities

Small Church Communities (SCCs) are a part of a pastoral initiative found throughout the world. SCCs bring together small groups of students, faculty and community members

weekly to pray, discuss scripture for the upcoming Sunday Mass and reflect on how it relates to our own lives. Why join an SCC? "For me, SCC is a welcoming setting in which we examine the intersection between faith and scripture on our daily lives each week." -- Graduate Student

Questions about SCCs, contact jenn.schaaf@yale.edu

May all SCC members pray for and with young people -- Pope Francis' special intention in May, 2022. @PONTIFEX

Let us [#PrayTogether](#) so that all young people, called to live life to the fullest, may discover in Mary's life the way to listen, the depth of discernment, the courage of faith, and dedication to service. [#PrayerIntention](#)

Sunday, 8 May, 2022 is World Vocation Sunday. Have you ever thought of joining and being active in a SCC as a vocation, a calling? Comments are welcome.

1. As mentioned many times, participation in an apostolic group in a parish is voluntary, but membership in a SCC is our DNA, is fundamental in our Catholic identity.
2. Indeed! Being in an SCC is a calling to "discipleship and apostleship" -- gathered and sent 🙌. This mirrors the two online SCC courses sponsored by LIM, Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA: "the Inner Life of Small Christian Communities (SCCs)" and "the Public Life of Small Christian Communities (SCCs)."
3. On my side and from my experience every Christian in my home parish has his or her own SCC! What remained is to insist on the active participation!

Recent discussions stress that SCCs are an entry point for new ideas, priorities and trends in Eastern Africa such as Child Safeguarding, going digital during the Covid 19 pandemic and using the Synodal Process.

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate
"The CARA Report" (georgetown.edu)

The Volume 27, No. 4 (Spring 2022) issue of *The Cara Report* has an article on "National Survey on Small Christian Communities." It is encouraging that the term Small Christian Communities (all capitals) is used to describe a faith-related organization beyond parish liturgical activities covering faith communities, faith groups, faith sharing groups and Based Christian Communities among other names.

Our free, online Ebook "Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa" is updated every month. The latest version of 1,550 pages as of 1 February 2024 has 19 chapters, an APPENDIX of 28 Online E-Resource Materials on the On-going Formation and Training of Small Christian Community (SCC) Members and 569 items in the "Select Annotated Bibliography." The Ebook can be found on the Tangaza University College Library Website under "Open Access List" under "E-Resources" ("Electronic Resources") at:
LIBRARY.TANGAZA.AC.KE
library.tangaza.ac.ke
<http://library.tangaza.ac.ke/.../Building-the-Church-as...>

It is available both **ADD** The March, 2022 Microsoft Word Version (a .doc File) is now available on the academia.edu and researchgate.net websites.

The latest chapter is "The Role of SCCs in the Synodal Church in Africa" (in progress).

28 May, 2022: "We shall be having tree planting and street cleaning at Nazarene University in Kenya with conjunction with Oreone Community. This is an excellent opportunity for SCC members to participate in *Laudato Si* Week."

Concerning one choice in the Seventy-Ninth Round of our SCCs Poll (<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>) -- The best part of my Small Christian Community is... "Praying together for peace in the world." One person quotes Jesus Christ: "Prayers move mountain." Let us continue to pray for peace in Ukraine. Yes, May God bring peace to that Country. Amen.

Everyone agrees, including the large number of Catholics "middle of the roaders," that many Young People are leaving/drifted away from the Institutional Catholic Church. Solutions vary. We have to find creative ways of attracting these people who are spiritual but not religious. We can reach them through social media. One solution is to encourage online peer group Young People Small Faith Sharing Communities. This is a type of SCC.

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) under the Main Menu on the left hand side of the Home Page:

How to vote on "The best part of my Small Christian Community is..." on this website:

Steps:

- a) Go to the Home Page.
- b) Move to the Poll on the right hand sidebar.
- c) Under Poll select one option by clicking on the option button on left of the six listed choices, that is, put a black dot in the circle next to your choice.
- d) Click on the Vote button to submit your voting choice.

You can vote once in a 24 hour period.

With the canonization of St. Charles de Foucauld in Rome on Sunday 15 May, 2022, we are reminded that Jesus Caritas Fraternities are special type of SCC.

Facebook Memories on the internet allows us to remember and celebrate past events such as this report from Maryknoll seminarian Victor Mutobera in Nairobi, Kenya:

On Pentecost Sunday 12 June, 2019 the Maryknoll Family on Manyani Road hosted the KU postgraduate Small Christian Community of St. Augustine. We had mass together in the main hall and later a shared meal. In the afternoon from 2 pm we had the Feast Day of St. Kizito SCC from Waruku. The majority were young men and women. Mostly aged between 24 years to 35 years. It was so vibrant and we had Father Lance Nadeau and Father Mike Snyder in attendance. One thing that was most interesting was during the *jumuiya* gathering a young man proposed to his fiancée. It was a surprise indeed. It was the young lady's birthday. The engagement ring was right inside the birthday cake. As she cut the cake, not known to her, the ring that was in the small box inside the cake was removed and the young man went on his knees and proposed to her.

I can remember the reason that we young people go to *jumuiya* is to express ourselves and talk about our relationships. And everyone got so excited. People were shouting and clapping for joy. And Nick Mulei, one of our Maryknoll prospect candidates, shouted at the top of his voice. The two who are the engaged are Patience and Pascal.



Food for thought and discernment for SCC members:

Sister Marie Rose Dione of Senegal believes the Catholic Church should do more to explore the links between synodality and African cultures. This means deepening a theology of synodality on the notion of the Church as the Family of God. This year is a time of grace that the Holy Father gives us with the theme of synodality: communion, participation and mission. As the pope says, "it is precisely this path of synodality which God expects of the church of the third millennium". In order to do this, it seems important to me to listen to all the components of the church, so that no one feels forgotten or excluded when it comes to giving his or her opinion on life, realities and current events of the church in this time of ours. In this great meeting of sharing, Africa has its say and should, for example, seek to explore the links between synodality and African cultures; deepen a theology of synodality articulated

with the notion of the Church as the Family of God in Africa so that the synod is not only an event but a process and a life. Furthermore, I dare to believe that synodality is not a parenthesis opened on the life of the Church that will close with the closing of the synod. We believe that synodality is a path and a process that extends over time and leads to the involvement of everyone for a change in mentality. By encouraging openness and systems of trust, by changing the mentality of rigidity and by trying to promote a culture of listening that is not afraid to welcome changes, suggestions and constructive criticism, the church will have taken giant steps and will be renewed from within for better service.

Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/.../synodality.../16110>



[INTERNATIONAL.LA-CROIX.COM](https://international.la-croix.com)

Synodality and its links to African culture

Religious leader in Senegal says Africa can help Catholics all over the world.

We are thankful for the success of the 2022 SCCs Course at Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya:

Course Code: PTUC 408

Course Title: Small Christian Communities

Department: Pastoral

Semester/Academic Year: Semester II, 2021-2022

Credit hours: 2Hrs

Purpose of the Course:

This course examines how Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are a "New Way of Being Church" and a "New Model of Church" in Africa today. It explores the practical and pastoral implications of SCCs in Africa with especial interest in the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) region. It also highlights the growing interest in Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) in Africa. In 2022 this was a required (compulsory) course in the Fourth Year of Theology in the School of Theology that was mainly devoted to courses in Pastoral Theology. There were over 150 students (mainly seminarians) in three sections of 50 students each.

Parishes that thrive build belonging in small groups like Jesus did: "Come with me" (a type of SCC and ministry small group) is the lead actively, like Jesus. A staffer with "woo" from strength finders is the "chief welcoming officer" and builds a 12+1 ministry group of lay woos. They staff an info desk after mass, welcome new school families, find the visitors

on Christmas and Easter and welcome them and invite them to a ministry group. Ministry groups then act like Jesus and his 12 disciples where they pray, serve, and socialize together monthly to build true Catholic belonging with each other. Each small group is the “parish within the parish.” Most parishes have 50-60 of these groups.

<https://docs.google.com/.../10wOz.../mobilebasic>

A type of SCC:

Pauline Jaricot lived in a France marked by anticlericalism and the decline of religious fervor after the French Revolution. Confident in the effectiveness of the Rosary to revive faith, she imagines a very simple way to bring her contemporaries closer to this spirituality: the Living Rosary in prayer groups of 15 people". Today, each user can form a prayer group of 15 people. Everyone agrees to meditate on one of the mysteries of the Rosary by reciting about ten a day, in communion with the rest of the group. Thus, each day, the group meditates together on the 15 mysteries, that is to say the complete Rosary. "Why is it such a powerful means?" one wonders. Here is the answer: because it only takes 5 minutes to pray a decade. It is accessible to all and is the ideal way to "gently" discover the spirituality of the Rosary. Furthermore, the method emphasizes "the power of the group": being a link in a chain of prayer, being aware of the communion of prayer provides support and motivation. The "Rosario" App makes it possible to create groups, even of 5 people: "In a small prayer group of 5 people who know each other, explains the presentation, each member receives a mystery of the Rosary on which to meditate each day, with a short text to guide the meditation. Each day, each one recite a decade while meditating on the mystery entrusted to him. At the end of the day, if the five members have prayed, the Living Rosary is complete". "With this App, and above all thanks to the love for the Virgin and the desire to transmit it - concludes Hozana - there are hundreds, thousands, of testimonies of people whose lives have been changed by the Rosary. Hozana ("Hosanna", acclamation of praise to God) is an association of believers and a social prayer network that allows you to create or join online prayer communities around spiritual proposals, on the website www.Hozana.org and Hozana app. The mission is to bring the world together in prayer, through the Internet, in the certainty that "prayer will save the world", the motto of the association. (PA) (Agenzia Fides, 24/5/2022)

May our SCC members actively continue our Easter journey together during these last two weeks calling on the Holy Spirit to energize us to be witnesses of the Risen Christ. In the spirit of synodality let us walk together, let us journey together.

Father Nicholas Segeja, the Director of the AMECEA Pastoral Institute (API) in Eldoret, Kenya, reports that the institute has a compulsory SCC unit for those students doing courses in Catechesis and Pastoral Ministry. This message led to the following string:

1. Having completed the same at Loyola University in New Orleans, USA, I highly recommend this. I wish the Bishops in Eastern Africa could advocate for the inclusion of a unit on SCCs on the Major Seminary formation curriculum.

2. Excellent, Michael. How do we get this message to the bishops and Rectors of Major Seminaries.

3. The bishops voted for this SCC Unit in 2002!!!! AMECEA Study Conference on “Deeper Evangelization in the Third Millennium” in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 2002.” Section 7 of the Pastoral Resolutions is on “Building the Church as a Family of God by

Continuing to Foster and/or Revitalize the Small Christian Communities,” No. 43 states: “We recommend that a program on the theological and pastoral value of Small Christian Communities be included in the normal curriculum of the Major Seminaries and houses of formation of both men and women.”

4. Thanks for this information. I have shared with my Archbishop the value of this recommendation on SCCs by AMECEA. I just didn't know a resolution had been passed in 2002 about the same. I will request him to remind the others as they (UEC) sit for their Plenary soon.

5. Good communications.

On this last day of Laudato Si' Week, Pope Francis' message to our SCC members is loud and clear:

@PONTIFEX

Today I invite you to [#PrayTogether](#) for our religious communities: may they be prophetic servants in the care of our common home and for the least among us. [#LaudatoSi7](#)
[#LaudatoSiWeek](#)

How are our SCC members responding to Cardinal-elect Robert McEvoy's challenge in the latest issue of *America Magazine*: “The most penetrating and sustained sadness that men and women in countless synodal dialogues [in the Catholic Church] have pointed to is the reality that young people have drifted away from the church in a seemingly unstoppable way. And the greatest hope that emerges from these same dialogues is that the church will find a way to bring our young people home. This is a profound imperative of evangelization that cannot wait two more years to be addressed.”

On this Feast of the Ugandan Martyrs let us pray in solidarity with SCC members whose Patron Saints are Charles Lwanga, Kizito, John Muzeeyi, Matia Mulumba, Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe and others. May their blood that was shed bring peace in our country during this election period.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Three Testimonies from Members of the Maryknoll Small Communities, Sal y Luz (Salt and Light)

As we celebrate Pentecost Sunday on 5 June 2022 we invite you to meet Elvety, Iris, and Luz -- mission animators from Maryknoll's Small Christian Communities and learn how Pentecost continues in their lives and communities. Pentecost continues today! Since the pandemic began, the Discipulos Misioneros Maryknoll team has sought ways to continue building a community that accompanies the journey of Hispanic/Latino pastoral agents in the United States and Central America. Following the exhortation of Pope Francis, “let us not allow ourselves to be robbed of community!” and inspired by Section 92 of his document, *The Joy of the Gospel*, we developed the Maryknoll...

Read More.....<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../Three...>

How is the Holy Spirit important in your life and in the life and activities of your Small Christian Community? Please answer in a message below. Some replies:

1. Our most common prayer is "The Sign of the Cross" that we make many times every day. Are we aware/conscious that the Holy Spirit is part of this important prayer? Also the ending of the prayer "Glory be to the Father..."

2. Great Question. Today is the birthday of the Apostolic Church and we are the church and temples of the same Holy Spirit. He is the engine of our human life activities and worship. It's a mystery one can't explain unless you're inspired by the same Holy Spirit.

3. Reflect on 10 *Bible* texts on the Holy Spirit.

4. Emphasize laying hands on the sick and invoking the Holy Spirit for healing.

5. @PONTIFEX The Holy Spirit, the Spirit of love, fills us with love, makes us feel loved, and teaches us how to love. He is the “motor” of our spiritual lives. #Pentecost <https://t.co/KOpwtfL>

ANNOUNCEMENT NEW ARTICLE: A Case Study of Training SCC and Parish Leaders in Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya
By Alphonse C. L. Omolo

Overview

In their declaration in the 1973 Plenary Assembly in Kenya, the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) Bishops said: “We are convinced that in these countries of Eastern Africa, it is time for the Church to become really ‘local’. We believe that in order to achieve this we have to insist on building Church life and work on the Small Communities”. (*AFER* 16/1-2, 1974, p. 4).

Indeed, in Eastern Africa people live, act, and associate on the level of smaller neighborhood communities i.e., rural villages, or urban estate communities. These integral community settings provide unlimited options for the Church in Eastern Africa to insert her life and work into the daily occurrences of the People of God.

Read More>><https://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../June-2022-Case...>

This Case Study of Training SCC and Parish Leaders in Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya can be an example and model for SCCs Workshops in other dioceses in the AMECEA Region.

Our Sister Website -- African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website -- is now hosted by Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya. Technically it is a sub-domain of the Tangaza Server, but it is a totally separately website with its own address (URL): <https://afriprov.tangaza.ac.ke> We thank Brian Kiboma, the Systems Librarian at Tangaza University and all involved in the transfer. We hope the website will be user-friendly – serving the research and communications needs of the Tangaza community and all others in our digital world. Enjoy. The commitment to spread the importance and usefulness of proverbs and other African oral literature is expressed in the Ganda (Uganda) proverb: "One who sees something good must narrate it." This African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website leads to further research, new collections, and fresh applications as expressed in the Sukuma (Tanzania) proverb: "That which is good is never finished."

The new copyright is as follows:

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How well do we remember our founders of the SCC Model of Church in Eastern Africa? We are invited to imitate the life of the Trinity that is a life of sharing. Bishop Christopher Mwoleka of Tanzania was one of the first persons to see sharing in the Trinity as a model for sharing in SCCs. He said: "I think we have difficulties in understanding the Holy Trinity because we approach the mystery from the wrong side. The intellectual side is not the best side to start with. The right approach to the mystery is to imitate the life of the Trinity...I am dedicated to the ideal of *Ujamaa* (Swahili for "Familyhood") because it invites all people, in a down-to-earth practical way, to imitate the life of the Trinity which is a life of sharing."

The Book of *Revelation 2:7* says: "Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches." During this Pentecost Season and approaching the Feast of the Trinity what is the Holy Spirit saying to our SCCs. Listen to Pope Francis:

@Pontifex

"I encourage all of you to invoke the Holy Spirit often during the day. His good and creative strength allows us to go out of ourselves and to be a sign of comfort and hope for others."

In our SCCs Poll (Small Christian Communities): Seventy-Ninth Round : "The best part of my Small Christian Community is..." one choice is "source of comfort to the lay faithful."

As we continue to discern and put into action how SCCs can participate in the Synodal Process, it is important to point out that the Apostolic Constitution that went into effect on Sunday, 5 June, 2022 states that a Vatican organism that is not part of the Roman Curia until now called "General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, now becomes simply "General Secretariat of the Synod". This is an important change aimed at reducing the clerical and hierarchical face of synodality.

If you were to put a drawing or a photograph or a symbol of the Holy Spirit on the wall of your living room, what would it be? Please answer below:

1. Dove
2. Light
3. I love a photo of the Holy Spirit surrounded by light.
4. Art from Korea

Art & Theology



Jae-In Kim (Korean), *The Holy Spirit Comes at Pentecost*, 1996, Collage.
 Source: *Joy in the Lord: The Collage Art of Jae-In Kim*, vol. 1 (New Haven, Connecticut: OMSC Publications, 2009)

Different cultures have different images of the Holy Spirit. This is inculturation.

5. I'll put fire because just like the Holy Spirit that was sent by Jesus Christ to be a helper the fire also, helps us to have food on the table. Fire is symbolic in most homes and it rare to visit a home and find that their's is no fire.

6. SI would put a drawing of tongues of fire as in the story of the first Pentecost when the Holy pirit came down on the Apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem in the form of tongues of fire over each of their heads (see the beginning of Chapter Two in the book *Acts of the Apostles* in the *Bible*).

7. Drawing or photo of a smile.

On the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website the "Welcome" Message has been updated with new information and new hyperlinks. Read it at: <http://afriprov.tangaza.ac.ke/>

An example of the African Forum on our Facebook Page is found in the following exchange of messages:

“How aware are we/how conscious are we that our SCCs are eucharistic communities?”

“They become more alive while the priest is around in celebrating the Eucharist.”

“Thank you. Agreed. What are your practical, pastoral solutions to the present worldwide eucharistic famine/eucharistic hunger?”

“Difficult one, but I think that a constant awareness of the Sacrament of Eucharist is essential in a small way not only when you train the candidates for receiving the Sacrament but contantly for understanding the importance of Eucharist.”

“In my homily today I am going to have an imaginary conversation with Pope Francis when I will respectfully ask him about the millions of African Catholics who go to a church today Sunday (often just a simple outstation chapel) but there is no mass and communion because there are not enough male celebrate priests.”

”Interesting. I also think that people themselves who hunger for Eucharist don't do much to promote vocations in their families. Thus why this hunger lives on.”

“Do you support the proposal of married priests to help solve this crisis?”

“I don't think that is the solution. Many people don't seem to be interested in religious matters any more. That commitment of serving the People of God for nothing is questionable. People are material oriented presently. I don't think that married priests is the solution. I am speaking in my context of South Africa.”

“Do you know the views of Bishop Fritz Lobinger, the retired bishop in South Africa?”

“Yes I know them. He was speaking from his perspective of his diocese. By the way he was our apostolic administrator sometime in our diocese before having Bishop Hirmer as our bishop in our diocese.”

“Lobinger proposed part-time married priests chosen from a Council of Elders or Team of Elders especially in rural areas in Africa who would continue with their normal salaried jobs.”

“A full discussion on this topic is found in our 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 (2012). The book is updated every month and is available as a free online digital (electronic) Ebook. 1,309 pages as of 19 June, 2022 on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at:

<http://smallchristiancommunities.org/building-the-church-as-family-of-god-evaluation-of-small-christian-communities-in-eastern-africa-2/>
http://smallchristiancommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Build_new.pdf”

“A good exchange of views.”

Today, 20 June 2022, is World Refugee Day in Africa. Father Joseph Healey MM uses the objective of SCC to build the Church as Family of God to the refugees. The results of SCCs focus on a change of heart, realization of convictions, and commitment among the adherents, if the work is appropriately done. There are Case Studies of SCCs in the Refugee Camps in Northern Uganda. We facilitated a "SCCs Training the Trainers Workshop For Those Serving in Refugees Ministry, Lodongo Spiritual Center, Arua Diocese, Uganda in August, 2018. There were 44 participants: 38 refugees living in four Refugee Settlements (Adjumani, Bidi Bidi and Palorinya in Arua Diocese and Palabek in Gulu Archdiocese) and six facilitators coordinated by the AMECEA Small Christian Communities Training Team.

Various reports being sent to the Synod Office in Rome on the results of the 2001-2023 Synodal Process mention Small Christian Communities. Here is a quotation from the FutureChurch Report in June, 2022: “I think the Spirit is moving in Small Christian

Communities, Intentional Eucharistic Communities, etc. Recall all of the ways that the pandemic created a new open space for online faith communities and worship.”

Searching on the internet produces these interesting and encouraging results:

For “Small Christian Community:”

1. Goggle Chrome: 1st Position Rank
(about 482,000,000 results -- 0.61 seconds)

2. Microsoft Bing: 1st Position Rank
62,500,000 Results

For “Small Christian Communities (plural):”

1. Goggle Chrome: 1st Position Rank
(about 136,000,000 results --0.57 seconds)

<https://www.google.com/search...>

2. Microsoft Bing: 1st Position Rank
3,210,000 Results

[small christian communities - Search \(bing.com\)](https://www.bing.com/search?smallchristiancommunities)

Today is the Feast of Sacred Heart of Jesus - Solemnity that is very important to the devotional spirituality of SCC members. Just look at the pictures on the walls of the St. Kizito SCC members in Waruku, Nairobi. This connects to one choice in the SCC Poll: "Source of comfort to the lay faithful."

An African inculturation depiction of the Gospel story of "Jesus Sends Out Seventy-two Disciples Two by Two (in Pairs)" (Luke 10: 1-9 -- 14th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 3 July, 2022) is found in African art. Tanzanian layman Charles Ndege is one of the leading religious artists in East Africa. In the Cathedral Parish of Musoma Diocese, Tanzania on one large wall Ndege created an inculturated oil painting called "Jesus Sends Out Seventy-two Tanzanian Disciples." He uses the faces of real people in Musoma Diocese-- the local African bishop, priests, sisters, catechists and lay people – to emphasize that we are all missionaries. These “Tanzanian disciples” are sent two by two in the spirit of small communities.

A similar oil painting called Jesus "Teaches Along the Lake Shore" is on the back wall of the chapel of the Makoko Language School, Makoko, Musoma, Tanzania. The setting is near Lake Victoria in the small village of Makoko, three miles from Musoma. The time is 9 a.m. with a bright tropical sun glowing on the horizon. In the background are local sailboats on the lake, small islands and rock formations that are characteristic of the local area. The huts and houses near the shore follow the design of the local ethnic groups, the Kwaya, Kuria, and Ngoreme and one modern tin-roof house. Jesus stands in the middle dressed in the royal color of red. He is sending out modern Tanzanian disciples two by two -- men and women, adults, youth and children. There is a mixture of elderly couples, women carrying babies on their backs and young boys and girls wearing a combination of traditional and modern African clothes. Some are still listening to Jesus's commission to "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15). Others have begun walking away on their missionary journeys. Some of these disciples have already gotten into the small boats two by two. Two others are riding a bicycle. Their faces radiate the joy and enthusiasm of being messengers of the good news. Traveling two by two (in pair) represents

the strength and energy of the Small Christian Community Model of Church in Eastern Africa).

The communal interpretation (sent two by two/in pairs) of these two African paintings remind us of the importance of the SCC Model of Church ("*kijumuiya*" in Swahili) and the Synodal Church where we journey together and walk together. Another interpretation of being sent two by two/in pairs: "To be an apostle means to be sent out on a mission. Every Christian is an apostle since every Christian is tasked with bringing Christ's peace and healing to the world. But Jesus never sends anyone out alone; his apostles can only accomplish their mission side-by-side with the Holy Spirit."

New Book:

Stan Ilo (ed.), *Handbook of African Catholicism*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2022. An African Edition was published in two volumes by Limuru, Kenya: Kolbe Press, 2023. Available on Amazon as a paperback and as an Ebook. For these Facebook Pages the handbook is valuable for two special reasons: 1. The chapters include examples of African Narrative Theology that is also called Story Theology. South African theologian Peter Knox says: "Thanks for sharing this insight that African narratives are now coming into mainstream theology in Africa."

2. A chapter on "Small Christian Communities in Africa: Histories, Themes, Development and Challenges," by Joseph Healey that treats:

1. Historical Development of Small Christian Communities/Basic Ecclesial Communities in Africa.
2. Themes of Small Christian Communities in Africa.
 - a. Relationships and Community
 - b. Biblical
 - c. Ecclesiastical
 - d. Pastoral
 - e. Contextual
 - f. Synodality
 - g. Mission
3. Development of Small Christian Communities in Africa.
4. Challenges of Small Christian Communities in Africa.
5. Bibliography

That this topic or theme is included in this *Handbook of African Catholicism* shows that the SCC Model of Church is important and taken seriously in Africa. We welcome more specific SCC examples and Case Studies.

There is a growing phenomenon of "House Churches" in Morocco. Over the past 20 years, small evangelical communities have been established in Morocco through the settlement of sub-Saharan Africans. "I've been coming here for two years," says Didier Komol, 33, from Cameroon. "I chose it because it is a Church of the Awakening," he says in reference to this particular evangelical community. "I noticed that the Spirit of God was with us. I feel the Spirit's presence and, at the end of the service, I am at peace," he says with satisfaction. Elohim Church is one of dozens, if not hundreds, of evangelical "House Churches" that have sprung up in Morocco over the last 20 years. These house churches join the "historical" Churches, which have been present since the protectorate and are recognized

by the king: the Anglican Church, the Evangelical Church in Morocco (formerly composed mainly of reformed Protestants) and the Catholic Church. Read more at:



INTERNATIONAL.LA-CROIX.COM

The growing phenomenon of house churches in Morocco

Over the past 20 years, small evangelical communities have been established in Morocco through the settlement of sub-Saharan Africans

As we pray for the 20th Annual AMECEA Conference on "Environmental Impact on Integral Human Development," let us be thankful that the AMECEA Bishops have made the SCCs Model of Church a pastoral priority in Eastern Africa.

New Article Announcement: "Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as Gathered and Sent: A Case Study of Two Online SCCs Courses" By Alphonse C. L. Omolo

NOTE: These two courses are part of the Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM) of Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA.

Overview

Perhaps, the best place to start this conversation on the experience gained from the Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM) online course on Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is to evoke the foresight of Lee and Cowan that SCCs are gathered and sent. In their visionary book, *Gathered and Sent: The Mission of Small Church Communities Today*, Lee and Cowan (2003) elucidate that: "Our conviction rooted in both theology and sociology, that a [Small Christian] Community is both gathered and sent. As gathered, it attends to the conversation of its inner life. As sent, it carries on a conversation with the larger world beyond its immediate constituency" (pg. 31). Read More..... <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../Case-study...>

Let us hope that Catholic dioceses, parishes and institutions in Africa take advantage of these Online SCCs Courses.

The "Synod Synthesis Report" from Trenton Diocese, New Jersey, USA echoes the experience of SCC members in Eastern Africa and around the world:

“Change of pastor has a big impact on a parish for good or not for good. Many comments about obstacles to participation were related to the change of a pastor – some dreaded a change; others were hoping for one. The stories shared mostly indicate disappointment that the role of pastor carries such power and influence that a new pastor can radically change a parish. Some were asking if the voice or charism of the parish community over time/generation after generation means anything?”

“Change of pastors changes everything.”

“I feel uncomfortable at my church. I feel it’s cliquish and I find Father intimidating and not often friendly. I went to [another] Catholic Church not long ago and I was shocked by the difference. People were so warm and friendly. And the priest made a point of saying hello to me and welcome. Soooo nice. When Father leaves maybe the church will change too if we get a warm and caring priest in.”

“A person spoke about “many silent departures” because of a change in pastor.”

“My many joys of being Catholic for over 50 years have now been turned into sadness as I see my lifelong vibrant parish (name given) slowly dying from the obstacles imposed by the harmful and ineffective ministry of the new pastor.”

“ Expressed frustration that parishioners have no input during pastor changes.

Evaluation of SCCs in Kenya: Presently there are 45,000 -- 50,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Kenya. We follow the Catholic Bishops’ pastoral priority of a SCCs Model of Church. Some SCCs are directly represented on their Parish Pastoral Councils (PPCs). During the Synodal Process we are trying to make these councils more inclusive (for example, adding a Young Woman and a Young Man to represent the Young People) and more deliberative with more powers for direct decision making. The PPCs work closely with the Liturgical Committees in their parishes.

The "Synthesis of Synodality in the Irish Church" recommends:

"SMALLER MORE INTIMATE COMMUNITIES BASED ON THE EARLY CHRISTIAN CHURCH THAT ARE: Less centred in church buildings and more centred around the warmth of true hospitality as role-modelled by Jesus, e.g. house eucharists/people gathering in their homes to pray together/communion of all baptized sharing one table."

“AMECEA PLENARY: AMECEA Bishops Award Regional Pioneer Trainer of Social Communications.”

Bishops in the Association of Member Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) region have awarded a Maryknoll Missionary priest and veteran journalist Father Joseph Graham Healey for his contribution to the training of pastoral agents in modern social communication in the region and the promotion of the Small Christian Communities ecclesiology.

The Lifetime Achiever Award was announced at the ongoing 20th AMECEA Plenary being held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania from 9 to 18 July, 2022. Father Healey, a member of the Maryknoll Fathers Society, was appointed to lead the training of pastoral agents in modern communication from 1968 to 1974. However, announcing the award, Bishop John Oballa Owa, the chairman of AMECEA Social Communications, said that since then Father

Healey has always been part of the AMECEA's history by promoting the use of modern means of social communications for evangelization and Small Christian Communities (SCCs).

Bishop Oballa of Kenya's Ngong Diocese, said Father Healey popularly known as *Mwanajumuia* (an SCC Member) who is founder of the AMECEA Social Communications Department, had continued fundraising for training and scholarship funds to support AMECEA Secretariat, bishops' conferences, and dioceses in training pastoral agents and lay people in charge of social communication apostolates.

He further said that Father Healey has supported the hosting and management of [AMECEA Website](#) since 1999. The native of the United States also supports the ICT capacity building in the region through the training of personnel in the creation and management of church websites. "He (Fr. Healey) has provided many study opportunities for scholarships at Masters and PhD levels in the region for pastoral agents and the laity including the publication of the Small Christian Community training handbook for facilitators in many languages. The priest also supported the hosting and management of the [AMECEA Small Christian Community Website](#)."

"AMECEA PLENARY: I am Grateful for the Award, Says Fr. Healey AMECEA Life Long Achiever"

The 2022 AMECEA Lifetime Achiever Award recipient Father Joseph Healey, MM, has expressed gratitude for the award and pledges to continue being one of AMECEA's roving ambassadors.

This is contained in a letter he wrote to the AMECEA bishops.

"Many, many thanks for the Lifetime Achiever Award that was announced during 20th AMECEA Plenary being held in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania from 9th to 18th July, 2022. I am deeply grateful."

Father Healey suggested that the award also be dedicated to AMECEA first generation pioneer Bishop Founders for their vision and planning. He said: "Recall Bishop Method Kilaini's excellent summary of the history of AMECEA in his talk this week. The AMECEA Bishops recognized the importance of Social Communications and made me the second full time priest staff member in the AMECEA Office in Nairobi after the Secretary General Father Killian Flynn, OFM Cap.

The Bishops during the AMECEA Plenary of 1967 said: 'We want to start an office for social communications connected to the general secretariat of AMECEA in Nairobi. The best journalism schools in the world are in the USA, so let's ask an American Missionary Society to provide a person. At the plenary the bishops turned to the then Maryknoll Society Regional Superior Father Joseph Glynn, MM who offered a trained Maryknoll priest-journalist ("hyphenated priest" in those days) to the AMECEA Office. That was me.

"My ministry was to coordinate Social Communications activities between the then five member countries in the areas of training, research, production and collaboration with similar organizations in electronic and traditional media. The first priority was to train local Africans. At the time Bishop Jean Jobidon, MAfr represented Malawi on the AMECEA Board and became the Chairperson of the newly formed Social Communications Department

of AMECEA. He was also a full member of the Pontifical Council for Social Communications in the Vatican. Bishop Jobidon inspired me to think big in developing social communications in the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa. Bishop Vincent McCauley, CSC, the Chairperson of AMECEA, had many good ideas for the office.”

Father Healey also recalled the two AMECEA Plenaries of 1973 and 1976 that stated that “systematic formation of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) should be the key pastoral priority in the years to come in Eastern Africa.”

He said: “This is the single most important statement made about SCCs and laid the foundation for the development of the SCCs Model of Church. Clearly the AMECEA countries were ahead of their time. In fact the very beginning of SCCs in the whole of English-speaking Africa can be traced back to the joint pastoral and missionary efforts of the American Maryknoll missionaries in the Luo-speaking Deanery (Nyarombo, Ingri and Kowak Parishes) in North Mara in Musoma Diocese in northwestern Tanzania in 1966.

The two main founders and visionaries who created the AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Key Pastoral Priority were Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, MAfr, the Bishop of Lilongwe Diocese in Malawi who died in 2012 (especially through his Mini-Synod in 1972) and Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, the Bishop of Rulenge Diocese in Tanzania who died in 2002 (who said that in his diocese ‘the entire pastoral work will be carried out by means of Small Christian Communities’).

In both these priorities of social communications and SCCs we continue to build on the shoulders of these first AMECEA Bishops. This includes moving into the digital world. The AMECEA General Website was started in 1999 and the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website was started in 2004. These websites grow from strength to strength. Now we focus on online training and coordination through workshops and seminars.”

One of the veteran Catholic journalists, Francis Njuguna of Kenya, had this “both... and” insight. Writing in Swahili he said that the AMECEA Bishops gave birth to the SCCs (*kuzaa*) and Joe Healey helped to raise them (*kulea*).

But Africa is also best served when her scholars and leaders are working not only among themselves but with other scholars and leaders in every part of the world. This is the wisdom of the spider’s web, an ancient wisdom on solidarity, patience, and teamwork left for us by our African ancestors—*When spider webs unite, they can tie a lion.*

End of the "General Introduction" in *Handbook of African Catholicism* (p. 52). Orbis Books. Kindle Edition.

There is a rich variety of names for SCCs. The List of “Acronyms” in the *Handbook of African Catholicism* has ten names in English and French. Of the 53 contributors to this handbook 12 are women and 41 are men.

Evaluation is necessary even if critical. A chapter in the handbook states:

"Yet the successes of SCCs cannot mask their shortcomings, including the clericalist control often imposed on them, their patriarchal leadership even when the majority of members are women, and the near-total absence of youth participation."

Handbook of African Catholicism (p. 1536). Orbis Books. Kindle Edition.
 II Pan-African Congress on Theology, Society and Pastoral Life
 (Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network)
 Catholic University in Eastern Africa (CUEA)
 Nairobi, Kenya
 Tuesday, 19 July 2022

Pope Francis prays that the Holy Spirit might inspire the Pan-African Catholic Theological & Pastoral Network, meeting in Nairobi, Kenya and calls this week's gathering of theologians, religious men and woman, laypeople and bishops in Nairobi to "discern what God is telling us today" a "sign of hope." The wisdom of the African ancestors, he stated, "reminds us of this important call that mountains never meet, but people do. NOTE: This is a famous African proverb well known in Swahili and in European languages such as Gaelic/Irish.

The discussion from 10:10 am to 11:10 am will be a Plenary Session on "Palaver/Dialogue/Synodality." Let us see if the SCCs Model of Church is brought up. At our African Theology Congress in Nairobi, Kenya we are discerning the connection/linkage between SCCs, African Theological Method (Palaver Theology or Conversation Theology) and the Synodal Process. Some comments:

- Thanks. This is yet another step up for the development and promotion of our dear and noble SCCs.
- Wow! That must have been a perfect platform for SCC the promotion of the role and significance of SCCs in the life and wellbeing of the Church.
- Great move towards effective SCCs development.
- Hope you find a synthesis. What of synodality and its actuality?
- Synodality is a slow and winding process.
- The future together.
- Without a secretariat that will implement the recommendations on any members resolution of Bishops that will include all Christians/ lay from all scc there would be no any impact otherwise the Bishops will always put their benchmark where they will dialogue themselves without touching the scc because the SCC are taken as receivers and directed and not involved.
- It much depends on participants interest area sometimes. The SCCs' strength is the fact that meaning of the subject matter has roots in scripture is very important. Theological soundness is good, its danger /temptation can be getting into intellectual battles and weighing scales. My humble submission is that here the brain more than the heart is at work. I do not deny that Gods spirit works in all our faculties, I only know experientially that that moment we allow to LISTEN with the heart to what God is saying from Scripture does MAGIC -- revealing the mind of God even through those with little theology. Listening with the heart to God then bringing it to lives experiences.

- It occurs to me that the synodal idea is also African. Think of the Palaver Method like the three year process conducted by Orobator on *The Church We Want!*

“Pope Francis hoped from this 2nd Pan-African Catholic Congress on Theology, Society and Pastoral Life, that proposes a theology of wisdom, could emerge paths that the Catholic Church needs, for example, to review the structures and styles of leadership in our dioceses, parishes, Basic Ecclesial Communities, religious congregations and homes that revitalize the Church.”

Chimombo, Emmanuel, “AMECEA: Pastoral Coordinator Assures Theologians That Small Christian Communities Domesticates Theology at Grassroots,” Talk at the Second Biannual Pan-African Catholic Congress on Theology, Society, and Pastoral Life, Nairobi, Kenya, "AMECEA Online Newsletter," Issue 441 (29 July, 2022), AMECEA Website, retrieved on 30 July, 2022,

http://communications.amecea.org/index.php/2022/07/29/amecea-pastoral-coordinator-assures-theologians-that-small-christian-communities-domesticate-theology-at-grassroots/?fbclid=IwAR1ZOiaKXyDLO7NiARGac7pL6x_-MAbP8z5cNFhEwVvLkpDfWMYJIDjv7EI

Many good insights on the SCC Model of Church on the grassroots level.

Newly ordained Maryknoll priest Mwanajumuiya Padri John Siyumbu, MM has been involved in SCCs for many years:

1. At Kenyatta University in Nairobi he was an active member of the *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo ya Mtakatifu Michael*.
2. He is a member of ST. ISIDORE OF SEVILLE INTERNATIONAL. ONLINE SCC.
3. He is an Honorary Member of St. Kizito SCC in Waruku in St. Austin’s Parish, Nairobi Archdiocese where he will celebrate his first SCC Mass at 2 pm on Sunday, 24 July, 2022.

Mwanajumuiya Padri John Siyumbu, MM ni padri wa kwanza wa Kiafrika katika Shirika la Maryknoll. Oyee! A new chapter in the history of the Maryknoll Society of Priests and Brothers.

Let us pray for the SECAM 19th Plenary Assembly with the theme: “Ownership of SECAM, Security and Migration in Africa and the Islands.” From Monday, 25th July to Monday, 1st August 2022 in Accra, Ghana. May the meeting discern a concrete plan for the Synodal Process on the African Continental level in 2022 and 2023.

Archbishop Andrew Nkea Fuanya of Bamenda in Cameroon told delegates of the 19th Plenary Assembly of SECAM that Pope Francis was inspired when he decided that the Synod on Synodality “should not be like the others, but should be celebrated at all levels.” The approach of the Synod on Synodality, he said, enables the Synod’s theme to be contextualized at all levels, beginning from the Families, to the Small Christian Communities (SCCs), to the Mission Stations, to Parishes, to Deaneries, to Dioceses, to Ecclesiastical Provinces, to National Churches, to Continental Churches and to the Universal Church.

NOTE: The term "Mission Stations" in West Africa is similar to our "Outstations" and "Sub-parishes" in Eastern Africa.

From the Message (Communiqué) of the Members of the Symposium of Episcopal Conference of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) at the end of their 19th Plenary Assembly in Ghana:

Reflecting on the Church in synodality, Catholic Bishops in Africa renewed their commitment “to promoting inter-religious dialogue and ecumenism”. This process of synodality has already begun at the level of Basic Christian Communities, parishes, dioceses, nations and regions,” SECAM Bishops said, and continued, “We are now entering the Continental Phase whose assembly will be celebrated in the month of March, 2023.”

They invited all the people of God in Africa “to support this synodal dynamism and to make it theirs through prayer and lifestyle.” In fostering the spirit of synodality, Catholic Bishops in Africa urged the people of God on the continent “to listen to the cry of the poor and the cry of the earth by caring for the environment, fighting against climate change and promoting social justice for the needy and the poor.”

Congratulations to Ghanaian Cardinal-designate, Bishop Richard Kuuia Baawobr on his election as the President of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM). He is a strong supporter of SCCs in his diocese of Wa, Ghana. May SCCs members around the world prayer for and with him.



CJPD

PRAYER FOR PEACEFUL & CREDIBLE ELECTION

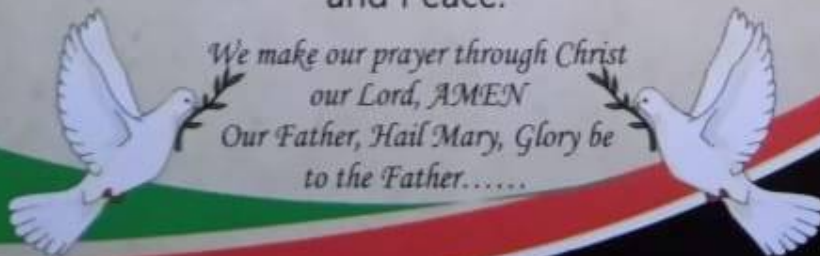
Lord God, we thank you for our great nation Kenya. As we approach our general elections, grant us peaceful, transparent, accountable and credible electoral process.

May we seek to better understand the issues and concerns that confront us as a nation and how the Gospel compels us to respond as faithful citizens in our community.

We ask you, to give us eyes that are free from blindness so that we might see each other as brothers and sisters, one and equal in dignity especially those who are victims of abuse, violence, deceit and poverty.

Grant us ears that heed to the cries of the vulnerable and minds that discern what is right and wrong. Enable us to choose leaders who abide by your word, live your love and keep in the ways of your truth as they follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ and guide us to your kingdom of Justice and Peace.

*We make our prayer through Christ
our Lord, AMEN
Our Father, Hail Mary, Glory be
to the Father.....*



May our SCCs pray this prayer.

The Gospel compels us to respond as faithful citizens in our community. Thanks for sharing this wonderful prayer. It's time to pray for peaceful elections.

Report of the July, 2022 Synod Synthesis from Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya. From the whole archdiocese a total of 41,577 Synod Questionnaires were completed and processed giving a 76.3 % response rate. The Synod Questionnaire were distributed through an estimated 3,336 Small Christian Communities in 114 parishes.

From the Communique during the closing Mass held at Msimbazi Centre in Dar es Archdiocese, Tanzania the AMECEA chairperson Bishop Charles Kasonde of Zambia read: The Bishops have also reiterated the calls for aggressive environmental sensitization campaign at the basic community level in order to raise awareness. “We reiterate the calls for aggressive sensitization campaign at the basic community level in order to raise awareness and improve our communication with the people on care for environment at all levels including at the Small Christian Communities and family level,” they said.

In a webinar on the Synod Process, Father Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ said that we need an African Continental Ecclesial Assembly, not an African Continental Episcopal Assembly. May a wide variety of people participate in this assembly including Catholics familiar with the SCCs Model of Church. This African Continental Event will take place from 1-6 March, 2023.

There is a big difference between “Christian Communities” and “Small Christian Communities”. French is a very important language in Africa. In our free, online Ebook on “SCCs in Eastern Africa” we use the following words in French (depending on the part of Africa):

Communautés de Base (CBs)
 Communautés Ecclésiiales de Base (CEBs)
 Communautés Ecclésiiales Vivantes (CEVs)
 Communautés Ecclésiiales Vivantes de Base (CEVBs)
 Petites Communautés Chrétiennes (PCCs)

From CCRI's "Reflections from Our Global Synodal Gatherings: Essential Reforms Needed in our Church Today:"

Having realized that many young people are drifting away from the Church, CCRI feels the importance of reaching out to young people. We are committed to hosting Online Small Communities of Young Adult Seekers to offer them a safe place to share their concerns and find support for the life issues they face. As an international and diverse group meeting regularly on Zoom, these groups are committed to growing together seeking to find their rightful place within the Catholic community.

Using the “see, discern, and act” method, CCRI members are committed to embracing community life each in our local regions of the world. When we see social injustice issues both within and outside of the institutional church, we will stand in solidarity with those being violated thereby living the Gospel values of Jesus Christ.

Recognizing in our synodal gathering that we have different viewpoints within our communities, we are committed to bridging the gap among these traditionalists, middle of the road Catholics, and progressives. In Eastern Africa, Small Christian Communities provide equal airtime for everyone during the regular meetings. The key to this working is having the proper training for Small Christian Community members where they learn how to disagree with respect and not demean other people's views (disagreeing with love). Facilitators also learn their needed skills through the continuous training that is conducted by the Eastern Africa Small Christian Communities Training Team.

The Synod Process in Lilongwe, Malawi:

As a footnote to AMECEA history this first historic synod in Lilongwe, Malawi was called in Chewa, the local Malawian language, "Mpingo Ndife Tonse" ("the need for active participation of the laity") The second diocesan synod was called "Tiyende Limodzi" ("the importance of collaborative ministry and unity"). Archbishop George Desmond Tambala started a third Archdiocesan Mini Synod in Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi from 30 July 2022 to August 2023 on the theme "Discerning with the Holy Spirit." He states: "We want to take advantage of the Synod [on Synodality] that is happening globally so that we can as well isolate some issues that are very relevant for our Local Church and find possible solutions which will give a better direction to our archdiocese." In the spirit of the *Acts of the Apostles* he said: "It is only when we do things together that we can say we and the Holy Spirit have decided."

Eightieth Round of SCCs Poll: The best part of my Small Christian Community is... One choice is: "Flexibility in digital communications and connections." We are discovering that if people cannot participate in Zoom Calls live and online, they can send messages/ answers via:

- Email.
- Chat Room.
- Text Messaging.
- WhatsApp.

Using the Chat Room during an online gathering is very helpful for the young adults who have problems with their sound or their video.

One of the creative examples of a Small Community is the Online Maryknoll Kenyan Affiliate Chapter that is an interfaith group of 26 individuals comprising Catholic laity and priests and Muslims from four continents: Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. It is coordinated by Marita and Gerald Grudzen of Global Ministries University. This Chapter belongs to the Maryknoll, a Catholic non-profit mission movement now comprised of four organizations, which has been the heart and hands of the U.S. Catholic Church's overseas mission work for more than 100 years. The four organizations (also called expressions or entities) are: the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers (also called the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America), the Maryknoll Sisters (a congregation of women religious), the Maryknoll Lay Missioners; and the Maryknoll Affiliates. There is a total of 45 Maryknoll Affiliate Chapters around the world that are a type of a Small Human Community (SHC). Of these chapters, three are online: Kenya that meets on Zoom once a month. A USA based chapter with eight members who meets monthly. A contemplative online chapter with 6 members who also meet monthly. Kenya is the only chapter that includes Muslims.

The "Select Annotated Bibliography of Books, Booklets, Articles, Reports, Papers and Printed Materials and Other Resources including Online Digital Resources" is up to 520 entries in our free, online Ebook at:

http://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf.

Many of these entries are annotated -- a suggestion that originally came from Tanzanian theologian Laurenti Magesa.

Father. Laurenti Magesa (1946-2022) – a Giant of African Theology Roman Catholic priest, theologian and teacher, Laurenti Magesa, died in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, on Thursday, 11 August, 2022, the day after he turned 76. To many who knew him, Magesa was a father (Baba) and grandfather (Babu); a friend and a mentor; a brother and a teacher. Magesa boldly states: "Ecclesiologically they (SCCs) are the best thing that has happened since the New Testament." He is mentioned 92 times in our free online Ebook. RIP. Laurenti was always supportive of the Local Community as theologizer -- theology from the grassroots, from below.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Communities As Part Of The 2021-2023 Synodal Process

PART I -- INTRODUCTION

My name is Alloys Nyakundi, a graduate from Loyola University New Orleans, LA, USA where I got a Masters in Pastoral Studies with a focus on Small Christian Communities from the perspective of young adults because of my passion for leading and promoting Young Adults Small Christian Communities in nine countries of Eastern Africa under the AMECEA Pastoral Department. While doing my undergraduate studies at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya, I gained insight into the needs of Young Adults through the Small Christian Communities for Young Adults that I facilitated at the Christ the Teacher Parish, Kenyatta University.

Breaking News on the Synod from *The Tablet*:

In September, 2022 a 24-strong "Working Group" drawn from all continents (mostly laypeople, but also bishops, clergy and religious) will meet for 10 days in a retreat center outside Rome, Italy to reflect on the syntheses from 115 bishops' conferences and other networks: religious congregations, Roman dicasteries, etc. The "Working Group" will draw up what is being called the "Document for the Continental Stage." Each of the seven continents will then reflect on that document in their continental "ecclesial assembly" made up of laypeople, clergy, religious and bishops. Europe's Ecclesial Assembly is planned for February, 2023 in Prague. The continental reports will then be synthesized for the final synod assembly in Rome in October, 2023 where the bishops will gather with and under the Pope, to make decisions in the light of what has seemed "to the Spirit and to us."

SYNTHESIS OF THE HYBRID MARYKNOLL KENYAN AFFILIATE CHAPTER'S RESPONSE TO POPE FRANCIS' CALL TO THE SYNODAL PROCESS 2021-2023

NOTE: As a hybrid group from four continents we do not fit into the synod reports of the National Syntheses. Therefore, we are sending this separate synthesis.

The hybrid Maryknoll Kenyan Affiliate Chapter is an interfaith and intercultural group of 26 individuals comprised of Christians (different denominations) and Muslims from

four continents: Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America. It is coordinated by Marita and Gerald Grudzen of Global Ministries University. This Chapter is affiliated with Maryknoll, a Catholic non-profit mission movement now comprised of four organizations, which has been the heart and hands of the U.S. Catholic Church's overseas mission work for more than 100 years. The four organizations (also called expressions or entities) are: the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers (also called the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America), the Maryknoll Sisters (a congregation of women religious), the Maryknoll Lay Missioners; and the Maryknoll Affiliates. There is a total of 45 affiliate chapters around the world. Kenya currently meets on Zoom once a month. Kenya is the only chapter that has Muslim members and is the first to be established from its beginning as an interfaith chapter of the Maryknoll Affiliates.

Our Maryknoll Kenyan Affiliate Chapter can be described/classified as a Small Human Community (SHC) and a Small Mission Community (SMC) in the theology and practice of the Small Christian Communities Model of Church. Small Human Community (SHC) is the name popular especially in Asian countries where Moslems, Buddhists, Hindus and other religion adherents are members of the Small Communities.

How can our SCCs be Eucharistic Communities? Please follow, and add to, the discussion and discernment triggered by this *NCR* article:

"South African bishop supports ordaining married men to priesthood to increase access to sacraments" | National Catholic Reporter ([ncronline.org](https://www.ncronline.org/.../south-african-bishop...))
<https://www.ncronline.org/.../south-african-bishop...>
 15 August, 2022

This is an important interview that I hope will get rightful attention and discussion at the Africa Continental Synodal Gathering (SECAM) from 1- 6 March, 2023. We pray that the participants discern in the Spirit.

From time to time the AMECEA Bishops have asked me to use my Institutional Memory to recall events of many years ago. In a quiet way I starting working with the Synod Office in Rome since 1995. From the AMECEA Office in Nairobi I brought documentation to Msgr. John Abreezze (since retired) in the Synod Office in Rome on how the First Africa Synod was being implemented in Africa in 1995. This was later published by the Synod Office.

Concerning Bishop Sipuka's interview I have documented some of this history carefully in my free, online Ebook on *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* that is on the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website that is under the AMECEA Pastoral Department in Nairobi, Kenya.

Rather than the Heading "Ordaining Married Men to Priesthood in Africa" I have used the Heading "Pastoral Solutions to the Eucharistic Famine/Eucharistic Hunger/Eucharistic Drought in Africa". But the topic is the same: how can millions of African Catholics can receive the Eucharist on a regular basis. Research show that due to the lack of male, celibate priests, on any given Sunday most Catholics in Africa (up to 60% in some surveys) participate in a "Sunday Service Without a Priest" especially in rural areas where there is usually no Holy Communion rather than participate in a regular mass. Pope Francis has spoken about this challenge several times.

Here is a quick summary of our research. We welcome clarifications and additional information.

1. The first reference to the term “Eucharistic Famine ” that we can find was Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana a’ Nzeki, the archbishop of Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya (who died in 2020)’s intervention at the First African Synod in 1994.
2. The many writings of Malawian theologian Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, MAfr, the Bishop of Lilongwe Diocese, Malawi (who died in 2012).
3. The many writings of Bishop Colin Davies, MHM, the bishop of Ngong Diocese, Kenya (who died in 2017).
4. The many writings of retired German Fidei Donum Bishop Fritz Lobinger (formerly of Aliwal Diocese, South Africa).

For me the bottom line is that if “the Eucharist is the source (*fons*) and summit (*culmen*) of the Christian life” (Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, No. 10 and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*). No. 1324), then we have a moral and a pastoral obligation to find practical solutions to African Catholics receiving the Eucharist on a regular basis.

Two other related topics on which the African bishops are divided and need discernment in the Spirit:

1. Should catechists distribute the Eucharist.
2. Should well built, secure out-station chapels have a tabernacle with the Blessed Sacrament.

Prayers please.

Follow-up from Bishop Sipuka: "It is good to make these deep theological insights as the tendency sometimes is to posture and théorisé. I am grateful for the information about the Eucharistic Starvation in Africa. Without wanting to shout aloud and make this matter a theoretical or ideological issue, I support the view to quietly engage with this topic because there is a pastoral need for it. it should be picked up for further consideration by SECAM leadership."

One insight: "Bishop Sipuka is really carrying on the legacy of his predecessor Bishop Hirmer and of course, Bishop Fritz Lobinger. His views are driven by pastoral necessity, and not an ideological position."

Some history: “In 2019, delegates at the Vatican’s Synod on the Amazon also requested that Pope Francis allow for the priestly ordination of married men on a regional basis, specifically for needy parts of Latin America, though the pope has not moved the issue forward.” It is clear that this issue or challenge varies from continent to continent. There is *no one size fits all solution*.

From Stan Ilo at DePaul University in Chicago, Illinois, USA: "Thanks so much, Bishop Sipuka, for your prophetic utterance and thanks Joe for always helping us to understand the historical context in our continent of some of these important discussions.

The early Church was quite bold in paying attention to the Holy Spirit, and in interpreting and understanding their context and birthing appropriate pastoral tools and structures to respond adequately to the pastoral and spiritual needs of God's people.

In our times, we seemed to have settled for echo chambers, talking and talking over the same topic without any boldness to creatively imagine a new reality, sensitive to our history and context and in humble attention to the God of surprises.

We have today a pope who is interested in supporting African Catholics to enact specific African responses to reform and renewal of the church in Africa including issues like clerical celibacy, liturgical inculturation, religious life and formation, marriage and family life, the role and place of women, a church that takes care of the poor and those at the peripheries of life, episcopal succession and accountability, and Catholic education among others.

The synodal process so far in the continent has been more like an assignment, that is, complete the questions, send your diocesan answers, and then wait for the results. What are the specific questions facing us in Africa? What are the internal structures, institutions and systems in our churches that hamper missionary conversation? How do we deal with the demons of rivalry, internal squabbles and animosity in our religious congregations, among priests and bishops all tainted with ethnicity, ego-trips, and pursuit of vain glory?

How accountable and responsive is the church in our continent to God's people in Africa, especially to the poor amidst the lingering crisis of the nation-state in Africa, failed leadership that all work against social transformation and the coming reign of God? These questions are not simply matters that can be honestly and seriously addressed through the kind of question-and-answer method in this current synodal process. They require some serious ground work and courageous engagement.

I personally believe that the issue of celibacy (keeping it, reforming it, making it optional, etc.) in Africa needs to be honestly confronted beyond being a response to the shortage of priests. There are fundamental issues that need to be theologically explored including the theological justification for compulsory or optional celibacy; the anthropological questions about the status of the celibate in Africa, the moral status of celibates who are sexually active and, in some cases, have multiple or single sex partners, and in some cases are in quasi-marriage with a woman and children; and the sexual abuse crises in our continent that have barely been touched. It also has to deal with the integrity of life of celibates and the credibility of the Church. We must also think of women religious who are also living single lives and how we include them in this kind of conversation because talks about celibacy always defaults to an all-male priesthood and the concerns of the men as if our female religious have been taken care of.... These conversations should be ongoing among us beyond this ongoing synod on Synodality."

Archbishop Dermot Farrell of Dublin, Ireland said that what was needed in the Catholic Church today included "functioning structures" — parish [and diocesan] councils and committees which work and which are empowered to work, and are allowed to work; more active involvement by all". SCCs are one of these functioning structures. as part of a new way of becoming church from below, from the grassroots.

After reviewing many Synod Documents I feel that our priority in making changes, even reforms is to "find an African pastoral solution in the local context." Key principal in making

changes and reforms is: *One size does not fit all*. Thus the focus on Contextualization and Localization. Example of polygamy.

“EPILOGUE: DREAMING ABOUT THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH IN AFRICA”
by Marehemu Laurenti Magesa in the *Handbook of African Catholicism*. Orbis Books. Kindle Edition.

1. “The theological importance of the local Christian community in its basic, parish, or diocesan forms, must not be allowed to continue to play second fiddle to that of the church’s leadership, specifically the clergy. The principle of subsidiarity must be upheld. The constitution of the church needs to reemphasize the ecclesiological validity of the Basic Christian Communities, what the *New Testament* characterizes as “household” churches.

2. For African peoples the human wholeness produced by authentic community and communion, harmony, cooperation, sharing, and participation is not merely something sociological; it is a deep spiritual need. Structures of the future church in Africa must take the need for this wholeness into account more earnestly than before. The ecclesiastical institution of Small or Basic Christian Communities that is emerging all across the continent is trying to address this need. It would seem that church communities that facilitate mutual contact and personal knowledge among the faithful of a given locality are the promise of a desirable African future church.”

This theological language is different from what we are used to. Let us hope that some African theologians write about SCCs. Small Christian Communities are here to stay. The relevance of the concept of the Small Christian Communities will always ring the bell in Africa due to its relevance to the human life on the continent. The concept of the Small Christian Communities will always continue.

Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa

Views: 2,213

NOTE: This is the SCCs Website Online Version of the Double Spearhead Nos. 199-200 (2012) Book *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of SCCs in Eastern Africa* published by AMECEA Gaba Publications — CUEA Press in Eldoret, Kenya. This online version is updated as of 15 August, 2022. The complete book is found on the Ebooks page or by clicking here. The book is also available as Part 1 and Part 2 for those with poor internet connection or challenges in downloading the full version. Part 1 can be downloaded by clicking here while Part 2 can be downloaded by clicking here. To order the printed paperback book click here

Part 1 of *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*

Part 2 of *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*

Full Version of *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*

http://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf

Nicholas Obiero CP, who coordinates the SCCs Course at Tangaza writes: "Thank you very much for everything. This is going to be of great help to our students."

The responses in the Synod Reports from SCCs can be found under the categories of "parishes, associations and movements." The summaries sent to Rome from bishops' conferences "are the fruit of discernment from the syntheses received from the dioceses," Hollerich said, while the syntheses of the dioceses come from the "listening sessions" and surveys of parishes, associations, movements, religious congregations, Catholic schools and Catholic universities.

There are many African Proverbs and Sayings on this theme of unity:

Pope Francis on rebuilding after an earthquake: "We cannot go very far if we walk alone. Unity alone can allow us to make truly difficult changes. We must leave behind all those things which divide us and hold up instead everything which unites us."

Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, SJ on the Synodal Process: "I am not afraid of the diversity. I think that's normal. But we have a unity which is much bigger than the diversity we experience now. And I'm looking forward to the whole process and to continue the process and to go into the next continental phase of it."

You are invited to vote in our SCCs Poll in the Eightieth Round : "The best part of my Small Christian Community is..." <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/> The six choices reflect the especially interests and priorities of Young People.

May our SCC members pray especially for the African Continental Assembly.

Then, from January to March 2023, the discernment will continue through Continental Assemblies involving bishops, priests, deacons, and religious and lay Catholics. The European Continental Assembly will take place in the Czech Republic on 5-12 February 2023, while the African Continental Assembly will occur in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, on 1-7 March 2023. The Central and Latin American Church is planning five different events in El Salvador (13-17 February 2023), the Dominican Republic (20-24 February 2023), Ecuador (27 February - 3 March 2023) and Brazil (6-10 March 2023).

These assemblies are a chance to deepen the listening and discernment of the synod process and demonstrate that the synod is designed as an ongoing process rather than a one-off occurrence. May our SCC members enter into this Synodal Process at the grassroots in the spirit and practice of walking together/journeying together with the whole leadership of the Catholic Church. In the Synodal Process may the richness of the pastoral experience of the Catholic Church in Africa be shared with the rest of the world.

The responses in the Synod Reports from SCCs can be found under the categories of "parishes, associations and movements." The summaries sent to Rome from bishops' conferences "are the fruit of discernment from the syntheses received from the dioceses," Hollerich said, while the syntheses of the dioceses come from the "listening sessions" and surveys of parishes, associations, movements, religious congregations, Catholic schools, and Catholic universities.

In the structures of the Catholic Church the next official larger group/grouping or level is

...

Family (basic unit): nuclear and extended
 SCC
 Outstation
 Sub-parish
 Parish
 Deanery
 Diocese
 Archdiocese
 Metropolitan
 Region (USA)
 National Bishops Conference
 Regional Bishops Conference
 Continental Bishops Conference
 Universal/Global Catholic Church

“Today many young adults are searching for meaning in life. One college student told me she was a devout Catholic who went to a Catholic High School on the East Coast of the United States. Every Sunday she went to Mass with her parents. In her freshman year at Michigan State University she dutifully participated in Sunday Mass on the campus. Then she began to “drift” and didn’t find mass that interesting. She joined an Evangelical Church on campus that had lively singing, a band and entertaining sermons. But after a few months she felt something was missing. She had an unfulfilled yearning, desire, hunger for something more. Finally, she discovered that she really missed the Eucharist at the Catholic Mass. So she returned to the Catholic Church on campus and now feels very nourished by receiving Jesus Christ every Sunday in the sacrament of the Eucharist.”

Pope Francis’ September, 2022 prayer intention: "For abolition of the death penalty."

In his prayer intention for September, Pope Francis calls on all people of good will “to mobilize for the abolition of the death penalty throughout the world.” “Each day, there is a growing ‘NO’ to the death penalty around the world,” says Pope Francis in the video released on Wednesday announcing his prayer intention for September. “For the Church, this is a sign of hope.”

In “The Pope Video,” produced by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, the Holy Father maintains that the death penalty is not necessary “from a legal point of view.” He argues that “society can effectively repress crime without definitively depriving offenders of the possibility of redeeming themselves.” He adds that there must be “a window of hope” in every legal sentence. Capital punishment, he says, “offers no justice to victims, but rather encourages revenge. And it prevents any possibility of undoing a possible miscarriage of justice.”

It is always possible to repent. Pope Francis goes on to say that the death penalty is “morally inadmissible” because it destroys life, and insists that “up to the very last moment, a person can convert and change.” The pope argues further that “in the light of the Gospel, the death penalty is unacceptable, because the commandment ‘Thou shalt not kill’ refers to both the innocent and the guilty.”

Pope Francis concludes his message with an appeal for all people of goodwill to mobilize for the abolition of the death penalty throughout the world.” “Let us pray that the

death penalty, which attacks the dignity of the human person, may be legally abolished in every country.”

From Francis Njuguna: “Thanks, *Mwanajumuiya*. Thanks to the Holy Father for this sharing. Our pope is a man to watch when it comes to speaking and defending human dignity. I salute him on this ground.”

One choice in our SCCs Poll is: "Communal listening to the Word of God." <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/> This describes exactly the value of the "Shared Homily" during Mass or the "Shared Gospel Reflections" during a weekly gathering of a SCC. A key is applying the Gospel to our daily life. This has to do with the "process" or "style" of the sharing, not just the content. Individual SCC members build on/add to what has been shared, not just every individual independently giving his or her scripture view or input.

Congrats to Maryknoll Seminarian Yohana Maswizilo who took his First Oath to the Maryknoll Missionary Society in Nairobi, Kenya on Sunday, 4 September 2022. This is an Historic Moment for Shinyanga Diocese in Tanzania. We praise Yohana for his commitment to the Small Christian Community Model of Church and to research and write about Sukuma Culture especially proverbs and stories. Prayers and blessings.

This Facebook Page can be a forum for discussion, exchange of views and discernment. A South African bishop supports ordaining married men to the priesthood to increase access to the sacraments. A Catholic lay leader in South Africa asks the views of other people as we discern the future of the Catholic Church in Africa. Please respond here.

This brought many comments and suggestions:

- “This challenging topic has been discussed and discerned frequently on our SCC Website under the theme of the "Eucharistic Famine" or the "Eucharistic Hunger." Go to: http://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf”
- “Don’t know much about the Catholic Church in Africa, but I dig the idea of married priests.”
- “I cannot fathom a married Catholic priest.”
- “Fine. If you do not support the pastoral solution of married Catholic priests, please suggest other concrete pastoral options that will bring the Eucharist to millions of African Catholics who only have ‘Sunday Services Without a Priest’ (and often no Communion) in their outstations.”
- “How about facilitating, intensifying and empowering catechists and other lay people to step in the gap where there is a shortage of clergy? How about the formation of the religious men and women? Can they be empowered to fill that gap? How about the catechists, men and women who, as it is already happening, are extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. Of course there is great opposition to this vision by those people whom I call ‘Catholic Fundamentalists.’ A section of Catholics who are beholden to the dictates of the Vatican I dispensation.
- “Agree. What about the many bishops who refuse to give the catechists permission to give out Communion especially in rural outstations? Who suffers? The lay people.”

- “True. Shouldn't they be encouraged to soften their stance when there is such a challenge? If the bishops are hardline, they should be challenged to offer practical solutions.”
- You try!!!!!!

One choice in our SCCs Poll is: “Helps to grow the spirituality of young adults.” Ron Rolheiser said, “It seems that the time is right to take small communities in parishes seriously and do what we can to gather our younger generations into small communities/small groups that allow them to engage with Christ through scripture, prayer, support, learning and action.”

This brought various comments:

- “Very good idea. Who will implement that?” “You. Me. Everyone. In other words we all have a responsibility to encourage Young Adults.” “Amen.”
- “Here is where ONLINE YOUNG ADULT SEEKERs SCCs come in.”

Recent scientific social research in the USA finds that for most young people, especially those going to non-Catholic universities, they are not drawn to liturgy--as least the the way it is done in most places--but rather to Small Sharing Groups [like SCCs] that also have a service element.

SCC members should be very interested in the major themes that emerged in the synthesis document for the synod on synodality released by the Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference at the end of August, 2022. The conference represents the Catholic bishops of South Africa, Botswana and Eswatini: “Widen the preaching circle to women and other laypeople, change the leadership style from autocratic and bureaucratic, move away from clericalism, and build more inclusive and welcoming communities, say Southern African Catholics.” “This synodal process has been invaluable in helping reflection on the implementation of the Pastoral Plan,” the report said. It encourages the Local Church to enter a phase of studying the diocesan reports so that, where possible, they can implement practical ideas and suggestions. “This will give people the confidence that there is action.” The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference's Report seems quite different from the reports of the Bishops' Conferences of Eastern Africa -- more open to reading the signs of times and practically responding to them.

Please note that Facebook has changed its format and guidelines. In each of your browsers you have to click on the blue box marked "Switch Now" -- "Switch into Small Christian Communities' Page to start managing it" -- into order to open a "Post Box" that says: "What's on your mind?" Then you enter your message.

From a French lay theologian: "Certainly, it is important to have Small Fraternal Communities of Faith (SFCFs). But participation in Sunday Mass, with an assembly made up of people who are sometimes completely different from oneself, reminds us that we are part of the same body of Christ."

Ongoing formation and training of SCC leaders is very important in the Synodal Church. Here is an example of Synodality Formation from an archdiocese in England:

Invitation to laity to attend Synodality Formation from the Pastoral Development Department: As part of establishing Deanery Synodal Councils (DSCs), the Pastoral Development Team are going 'on the road' to meet you half-way, as it were, with a new synodal formation session. This will be repeated in six venues across the archdiocese, and we wanted to open this opportunity up to include also all priests, deacons and religious so that we can support one another in establishing good practice.

You are invited to book your attendance at one of these venues to join with the members of local DSCs. This formation offers a chance to deepen our understanding of synodal ways and of operating as synodal bodies across our parishes and deaneries. We will be looking at practical aspects of synodality and provide some guidance, while modelling listening to one another throughout the session. In fact, by coming together for this training in such a variety, we will already model to one another how to be more synodal by our willingness to come together and listen to one another.

To complete this rich variety of people we seek to gather, if you know of any lay people who may benefit from (and benefit your parishes, groups or deaneries after) this training, do send on this information so they can register as well. If you can't make the session closest to you, you are free to register for any of the sessions.

We are blessed. In our SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa ongoing adult faith formation and training is our top priority. Much of this formation takes place in the SCCs themselves, for example, the weekly *Bible* Reflection when we read the Gospel of the following Sunday and apply it our daily lives. A serious evaluation can determine how effective this formation is.

Report on the African Continental Synodal Gathering in March, 2023

The African Continental Ecclesial Assembly (Synodal Gathering) will be held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from Wednesday, 1 March to Tuesday, 7 March 2023. This assembly will involve 150 delegates -- bishops, priests, deacons, religious and lay Catholics. The delegates will be chosen by the SECAM Office in Accra, Ghana in consultation with others. The Working Document is the Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) that will be published by the Synod Office in Rome in late October, 2022. This assembly is a chance to deepen the listening and discernment of the synod process and demonstrate that the synod is designed as an ongoing process rather than a one-off occurrence.

The Document for the Continental Stage (DCS) is a compilation of the National Syntheses worldwide including over 30 countries in Africa. Just one example: The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference released its synthesis document for the synod on synodality at the end of August, 2022. The conference represents the Catholic bishops of three countries -- South Africa, Botswana and Eswatini: The report recommended: "Widen the preaching circle to women and other laypeople, change the leadership style from autocratic and bureaucratic, move away from clericalism, and build more inclusive and welcoming communities. This synodal process has been invaluable in helping reflection on the implementation of our Pastoral Plans. It encourages the Local Church to enter a phase of studying the diocesan reports so that, where possible, they can implement practical ideas and suggestions. This will give people the confidence that there is action." The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference's Report seems quite different from the reports of the Bishops' Conferences of Eastern Africa -- more open to reading the signs of times and practically responding to them.

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) in their National Synthesis
<file:///C:/Users/Father%20Joe/Downloads/SACBC-Synod-Synthesis-FINAL-REPORT.doc.pdf>

of the synodal process in the country emphasized that the process can only be successful through the quality of listening, dialogue and a desire to relate in new ways. The bishops said there was a need for a change in the style of formation at all levels for new ways to emerge, postulating the formation and training of adults, catechists, liturgy groups, parish pastoral and finance committees as well as Small Christian Communities (SCCs).

NAFSCC Membership Meeting

Description: "Join in an animated discussion of Small Christian Communities and their future and place in the local parish during the post Church Synod era."

Time

September 28, 2022 03:00 PM in Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Please click this URL to join.

US02WEB.ZOOM.US

Join our Cloud HD Video Meeting

In discerning the identity of our Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community, we realized that it needs an Inner Life (spirituality, prayer, *Bible* Reflection, etc.) and a Public Life (reaching out in projects and activities connected to climate justice (climate change, global warming, ecology and the environment), gender justice, immigration, service to others, etc.).

A valuable addition is this quote from "Canada's National Synod Synthesis:" "No. 23. With respect to carrying out the Catholic Church's mission, many pointed to the primacy of charity and service in the life of the church. This presents a fundamental challenge for the rebirth of faith communities, since evangelization will only be credible when it is closely and clearly united to the preferential option for the poor and excluded and a strong proclamation of the dignity of the human person."

How many SCC members know that World Mission Sunday is on Sunday, 23 October, 2022? Always the second to last Sunday of October. "You shall be my witnesses" is the theme this year. How will you celebrate in your SCC?

From Newark Archdiocese, New Jersey, USA Synod Synthesis:

Small Christian Communities

Giving examples, the synthesis noted that "parishioners can be invited to come together for Small Christian Communities, Bible study, books, journal studies, etc., on parish or deanery levels." Interesting that clicking on the blue link above takes you to the SCCs Website.

Today in New Jersey in the USA I celebrated a Zoom Mass for our extended family. I realized that a Zoom Mass is 40 minutes (internet time limit) -- so unlike the two to three hour masses in Africa.

Alloys Nyakundi writes from Kisii, Kenya: "It's through my interaction with many Christians in my ministry of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) that I came to learn that lay people like homilies given by the catechists more than the ones given by the priests. This is because their homilies are centered on the real issues affecting the people in the local areas. Catechists spend most of their time interacting with people in their local areas throughout the week and then they prepare their homilies based on those experiences. This is unlike the priests who live in the parish (sometime far away) that gives them limited interaction with the Christians."

Experts from five continents -- with various competencies and perspectives -- are meeting until 2 October, 2022 in the Italian city of Frascati, near Rome, to produce the *Document for the Continental Stage (DCS)* in the Synodal Process 2021-2023 and thus continue the process of discernment, dialogue and listening. Prayers, please.

May our SCC members join Pope Francis in praying:

@PONTIFEX

Today is World Day of Migrants and Refugees. Let us renew our commitment to building a future that puts migrants, refugees, displaced persons and victims of human trafficking at the center. The Kingdom of God is built together with them. [#WDMR2022](#) @M_RSection Many insights and challenges in this Twitter Message from Pope Francis.

We hear a lot about inter-religious dialog and inter-faith dialog in Kenya today. But we do not talk about, discuss and discern enough "the elephant in the room," namely inter-ethnic dialog. **NOTE:** We use the word "ethnic group" rather than "tribe" today. We know that tribalism is a disease that is harming our government, our churches and other religious institutions and our whole society. The basic question is how the 70 plus ethnic groups in Kenya can share with each other, talk with each other, work with each other and in the Synodal Process Language "walk with each other"/"journey with each other."

From the "National Synthesis of the People of God in the United States of America for the Diocesan Phase of the 2021-2023 Synod:"

"Many who conducted listening sessions described being transformed by the process of listening to others' stories and hearing about their faith journey. Those who shared their stories, especially those who participated in small group [like Small Christian Communities] sessions, stated that they felt listened to by the Catholic Church for the first time." (From Region XI Synthesis).

"Participants of every age and demographic group spoke of the need for lifelong formation. They would like to see more opportunities for "Bible study," in-person and online courses, lectures, small group [like Small Christian Communities] discussions, and convocations among other offerings" (From Region VI Synthesis).

May all our SCC members pray for:

Three theologians from Africa – a laywoman Mrs. Philomena Mwaura from Kenya, a religious Sister Anne Beatrice Faye, CIC from Senegal and a priest Father Paul Bere, SJ from Burkina Faso – are part of Synod Drafting Team who are in Frascati, Italy until 2 October, 2022 to produce the "Document for the Continental Stage (DCS)" of the Synod on Synodality 2021-2023. All three contributed chapters to our latest Orbis Book – *Handbook of African Catholicism*.

Appointments of new consultors: Pope Francis, 29 September, appointed 10 new consultors to the Dicastery for Communications.

The Dicastery's new consultors are Fr. George Plattoham, secretary of the Office of Social Communication of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC); Oscar Elizade Prada, coordinator of the Department of Communication of CELAM; Helen Osman, president of SIGNIS; Fr. Fabio Pasqualetti, dean of the Faculty of Communication Sciences at the Pontifical Salesian University; Sr. Veronica Donatello, head of the National Service for the Pastoral Care of Persons with Disabilities of the Italian Bishops' Conference, Sister Adelaide Felicitas Ndilu, national executive secretary of the Commission for Social Communications of the Kenyan Bishops' Conference and director of Radio Waumini; Father Andrew Kaufa, coordinator of the Office of Communications of the AMECEA Regional Conference of Bishops; Tomas Insua, executive director of the Laudato Si movement; Professor Antonio Cisternino, president of the University of Pisa's Ateneo Information System (CIO); and John E. Corcoran, founder of Trinity Life Sciences.

Have you read the Gospel for next Sunday's Mass? It is easier if we read it ahead of time, and reflect on it, in a weekly SCC. Let us all SCC members be Lectionary-based Catholics.

Let us explore the relationship between SCCs and the Synodal Process. Let us hope that SCCs are mentioned in Synod Continental Document.

Africa is under-represented in the Catholic world media. Let's keep trying in getting the word out. You may be interested in this Podcast.

"The Church in Africa Will Never Walk Alone." By Joseph G. Healey. Radio Podcast in the "African Catholic Voices" series sponsored by the Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network (PACTPAN), 28:26 minutes. retrieved 27 September, 2022, Part 1 (buzzsprout.com). Video Podcast in the "African Catholic Voices" series, 29:04 minutes, retrieved 1 October, 2022, YouTube Website The Church in Africa will never walk alone : Fr Joseph G. Healey (Part I) - YouTube

Maryknoll missionary, theologian, professor, and communication expert, Fr. Joseph G. Healey speaks on the renewal and reform of the Catholic Church in Africa. His favorite song is "You'll Never Walk Alone" from the 1945 American Broadway Musical "Carousel." At 84 and after 56 years as a priest, Joseph G. Healey exudes a freshness of perspectives, a depth of knowledge, and an arresting humility that are both compelling and inspirational. After more than 50 years of pastoral work in Africa, he carries the institutional memory of the post-Vatican II Church, and theology in Africa. He is considered one of the fathers of Small Christian Communities in Africa and is one of the pioneers of African Narrative Theology. In this first part of our dialogue with "Mwanajumuiya" ("Member of a Small

Christian Community”) as he likes to be called, he shares with us his love for Africa, his enduring passion and commitment for the renewal and reform of the Church and for grassroots evangelization in inclusive African communities of faith. Fr. Healey is very proud of AMECEA's Social Communications Department that he pioneered in the early days of his priesthood and looks back in time in this episode. He leaves us with a very hopeful message that Africa and the world will never walk alone because the God of our ancestors is always with us. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhX9VE0ZveM> This title is closely related to the Agaw (Eritrea and Ethiopia) Proverb and Burkina Faso Proverb: *If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together.*



[YOUTUBE.COM](https://www.youtube.com)

[The Church in Africa will never walk alone : Fr Joseph G. Healey \(Part I\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhX9VE0ZveM)

[At 84 and after 56 years as a priest, American Maryknoll priest, missionary, theologian](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhX9VE0ZveM)

Many of the reports on the Synodal Process indicate we Catholics have not done well in involving people on the margins and the peripheries of society in our Synodal Gathering/Sessions. Thus it is important that the 29 September, 2022 gathering of the Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community asked this question: "What has been your experience with people on the margins in your local community (Outer Life or Public Life of Small Christian Communities)?" This Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community's major issues include LGBTQ, women's rights, climate change and youth empowerment.

Prayer for the Synod during October, 2022 Mission Month.

EN



Father, we want to be missionaries of the encounter,
like your Son, Jesus Christ.
Since, only by meeting each other from the heart
we will be able to make of this Synodal Path
a space of fraternity and true listening.
Help us not to take refuge in formality or pretense.
Move us to remove our masks
And to have the courage to open our hearts
to look others in the eye and listen to what they have to say.
Let us be sensitive to the questions of our brothers and sisters,
so that we can create a fruitful change in the Church that You dream.
May Your Holy Spirit inspire us to work in diversity
accepting our differences and being nurtured by them.
Touch our hearts so that the encounter with each other
moves us from our old habits
and leads us through new ways of authenticity,
in which we can reveal the good news of Love.
Amen.



Pope Francis's October, 2022 prayer intention:

"A Church That Walks Together"

Pope Francis releases his prayer intention for the month of October, 2022 in which he asks that the church be one of synodality, which means walking together, along the same road. As is customary at the beginning of every month, Pope Francis has released his prayer intention for the month of October: "A Church that is open to everyone". In "The Pope Video," produced by the Pope's Worldwide Prayer Network, the Holy Father begins by asking "What does it mean 'to synod'?", before answering himself, that it means walking together: syn-od. He explains that in Greek, the word synod means to walk together, and to walk on the same road. This, continued the Pope, "is what God expects of the church of the third millennium – that it regain its awareness of being a people on the road and of having to travel together".

He adds that a church with this synodal style is one that listens, aware that listening is more than just hearing. "It means listening to each other in our diversity and opening doors to those outside the church. It's not about gathering opinions, nor holding a parliament. The synod isn't a survey; it's about listening to the protagonist, the Holy Spirit. It's about praying. Without prayer, there will be no Synod", says the Pope.

His two-minute-long video, which shows images of people walking, praying and attending classes together, ends with the Holy Father asking that we "take advantage of this opportunity to be a Church of closeness, which is God's style –closeness", as well as asking that we "give thanks to all the people of God who, with their attentive listening, are walking the synodal way".

Finally, the Pope says, "let us pray that the Church, ever faithful to the Gospel and courageous in preaching it, may live in an increasing atmosphere of synodality and be a community of solidarity, fraternity, and welcome".

VATICANNEWS.VA

Pope's October prayer intention: "A Church that walks together" - Vatican News

https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-10/pope-francis-prayer-intention-october-church-open-to-everyone.html?fbclid=IwAR2QOEgcp3xM-PKE5eW2psDM2noLsm2y1MT9THvjRB_eAVPYa3RF5cnkXss

Please share your stories in different SCC forums.

Bishop Frank Caggiano of Bridgeport Connecticut, USA says: "My sense is, if I read those synodal documents correctly, the pope wants to hear people's personal stories of faith. So where has the church been an aid in your spiritual journey? Where has it been a challenge or obstacle if you are not active in your life of faith, in the church? Where do you draw your spiritual sustenance? Where do you find your consolation? Where do you find your joy in life? So it's more of an existential sort of question. If young people are leaving the church, which they are, where are they going and what are they doing with their basic desire to have a relationship with something far greater and more meaningful?" This is a perfect opportunity for SCCs like Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community to share their stories.

October, 2022 is "Mission Month," with World Mission Sunday falling on 23 October, 2022 under the theme "You Shall Be My Witnesses." In the Synodal Process Pope Francis reminds us that through Baptism we are ALL missionary disciples. How are you and your SCC witnessing this year? Please give examples. I am concelebrating Mass on World Mission Sunday in the Cathedral of Paterson Diocese, USA. I will explain the activities of SCCs in Eastern Africa to anyone who is interested.

Remember the Ugandan proverb: *One hand washes the other*. Traveling now in the USA I am discovering that our Eastern African SCC experiences can enrich the USA experience. In our weekly Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa we find that reading different versions of the same Scripture text is creative and can lead to deeper interpretation and application. For example our method is:

1. Read the Scripture text for the first time:

James 2:14-17 (New International Version)

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? 15 Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and daily food. 16 If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? 17 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

2. Two minutes of silence when we ask: What is God saying to us in this Scripture passage? (not what is my interpretation).

3. Read the same Scripture text for the second time:

James 2:14-17 (New Revised Standard Version)

14 What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but does not have works? Surely that faith cannot save, can it? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17 So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

Different translations use "action," "works" and "deeds."

A popular saying in Eastern Africa is: *A woman cannot be half pregnant*. It is used to challenge journalists and writers to be accurate in their spelling, in their facts and in their titles.

Take this example:

AMECEA Website: Rev. Fr. Andrew Kaufa Coordinator Social Communications Department (CORRECT)

Vatican Website: Fr. Andrew Kaufa, S.M.M. coordinator of the Office of Social Communications of the AMECEA Regional Conference of Bishops (INCORRECT)

Founded in 1968 the AMECEA Social Communications Department based in Nairobi, Kenya presently has a three-member staff:

- Andrew Kaufa, Coordinator
- Jecinter Antoinette Okoth, Assistant Producer of AMECEA Online News/Administrative Secretary
- Bernard Mberere, AMECEA ICT Co-ordination Office/ICT Officer

During October, 2022 as "Mission Month"/"Missionary Month" may our SCC Members be inspired by Pope Francis' Twitter prayer: "During this month of October and [#prayer](#) for the Mission of the Catholic Church, let us learn to cultivate moments of silence and of contact with the Lord so that he might inspire us with the ways and means to be always faithful to our vocation as missionary disciples."

October, 2022 is "Mission Month," with World Mission Sunday falling on 23 October, 2022 under the theme "You Shall Be My Witnesses." In the Synodal Process Pope Francis reminds us that through Baptism we are ALL missionary disciples. How are you and your SCC witnessing this year? Please give examples.

We are celebrating the 10th Anniversary of our weekly St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC Gathering on Monday, 17 October, 2022. The historical note in our free, online Ebook states:

Using Skype Video Conferencing we started on Wednesday, 17 October, 2012 with one person from Kenya, one person from Germany, 13 people from the Maryknoll Lay Missioners Orientation Program at Bethany, New York, USA and four others including several Maryknoll Sisters who served in Tanzania. Some of us were participating in a SCC Workshop at the Maryknoll Sisters Center at Maryknoll, New York, USA. The Maryknoll Society Tech person connected us with Alphonse Omolo who was studying in Germany and Rose Musimba who lives in Nairobi, Kenya through the internet.

Who is going to bake our Virtual Cake???

Congratulations to one and to all. Let us harvest the memories.

From Alphonse Omolo: “It has been 10 years of great inspiration 🙏 Perhaps, there should be a real cake 🍰 Any of our members in the same location in next week? Happy 10th Founding 🎉”

As we celebrate the 10th Anniversary of our St. Isidore of Seville SCC on Monday, 17 October, 2022, we have analyzed the unique identity of our St. Isidore of Seville Weekly Lectionary-based International Online Small Christian Community (SCC) Gathering as follows:

St. Isidore of Seville: patron of the internet.

Weekly: every Tuesday 52 weeks of the year come rain or shine.

Lectionary-based: we read and reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday in the Catholic Church’s Liturgical Cycle and apply it to our daily lives.

International: presently we have members from Germany, Kenya, Tanzania and the USA.

Online: virtual or digital using the Skype social media platform.

Small Christian Community (SCC): Following the SCC Model of Church in Eastern Africa (AMECEA).

Gathering: we prefer this word to “meeting.”

Comments are welcome.

Congratulations to St. Isidore SCCs members for helping me understand how to relate the Gospels to my daily life. My faith has really grown because of the rich experiences we share during our weekly gatherings. *Mwanajumuiya* Joe Healey thanks so very much for inviting me to be part of this online community.

For our SCCs Forum: "What are the pros and cons of having all women SCCs, all men SCCs and Mixed SCCs in parishes and on college/university campuses? Please reply here.

1. Key factors are the local context and the local priorities.

2. Support communities/groups can have different priorities: personal spiritual growth; pastoral effectiveness; theological reflection; specific Bible reflection; missionary reflection. A new type is a Zoom Community/Group.

3. One observer states: " It depends on the types of SCCs and their priorities. Let us start with college/university campuses: 1. Social: mixed is preferred. 2. Faith sharing: both/and is preferred. 3. *Bible* sharing: mixed is preferred.. 4. Support communities/groups: single sex is preferred.

In Eastern Africa the key priority is for the mother and father (husband and wife) to "model" participating in the weekly SCC together. If the father does not go the children will say: "Dad doesn't go. Why do we have to go?"

Recent college graduate: "One size doesn't fit all. Depends on one background/experience and the local context. All Women SCC allows young women and share particular issues related to them. Mixed Group broadens one's experience.

Part II of the Podcast and YouTube Video in the "African Catholic Voices" series is now online. Despite the provocative title, I am not the originator of these pastoral and theological ideas and views. I am the communicator/networker of African theologians like Laurenti Magesa, Bishop Sipuka and Bishop Lobinger.

"Fr Joe Healey Speaks on African Theology, Calls for Married Priests in Africa To Meet the Eucharistic Hunger in Africa, and a Welcoming African Church for Same-Sex Persons," Part II. By Joseph G. Healey. Radio Podcast in the "African Catholic Voices" series sponsored by the Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network (PACTPAN), 43:10 minutes. retrieved 15 October, 2022, [Fr Joe Healey speaks on African theology, calls for Married Priests in Africa to meet the Eucharistic hunger in Africa, and a welcoming African Church for Same-Sex Persons \(buzzsprout.com\)](#). Video Podcast in the "African Catholic Voices" series, 43:10 minutes, retrieved 15 October, 2022, YouTube Website [African Theology, Married Priesthood, Same-Sex Marriage and the Future of Africa Catholicism \(II\) - YouTube](#)

In this concluding discussion, Maryknoll priest, professor, communicator and Small Christian Community pioneer in Africa, Fr Joe Healey, celebrates the development and achievement of African theology. He calls for a more creative church in Africa and hopes for a day when the Catholic Church in Africa will begin to ordain married men as priests. He sees this as an important item to be discussed in the synodal encounter of the African continent in Addis Ababa. He also bemoans the plight of same-sex persons in Africa and calls on the Church in Africa to welcome them rather than deny their existence in Africa.

The Maryknoll Movement Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team includes Rick Dixon, MLM (covering Latin America), Sister Esther Walioba, MM (covering Asia) and Father Joe Healey, MM (covering Africa).

Young adults from different parts of the world are meeting in different forums to talk about issues affecting them. That's why we must keep encouraging young people to form their own Small Christian Communities through which they can share what they are doing so that other young people from different parts of the world can get to learn and know the kind of projects they are doing. The Online Young Adult Seekers meet twice a month on zoom to share their life experiences and how they can solve issues affecting people in their local

communities. I hope other young people from different parts of the world can take advantage of the online platforms to share their experiences about life, the church and other activities they are doing.

Two of our SCCs members (Alloys Nyakundi and Collins Ong'oma) had a consultative meeting with Ambrose who is the National Youth Chair of the Catholic Church in Kenya. Top on the agenda was how On Campus SCCs can network and work collaboratively instead of working in isolation. People will never know our stories unless we write them.

How many of us SCC members are celebrating World Mission Sunday on Sunday, 23 October 2022? How many of us SCC members even know that the feast exists?

For some of us -- Sister Rita, Father John Siyumbu and myself it is our DNA, our identity, the heart of our vocation -- -- mission. We are members of missionary societies/congregations.

Our good SCC friend of many years – Brother Bob Moriarty – says that World Mission Sunday “flies under the radar” in the USA for the following reasons:

- Many Catholics have never heard of the feast.
- Many Catholics mix up the date. It is always the next to last Sunday in October. Not always the third Sunday of October.
- It competes with other priorities of the Catholic Church in the USA in October – Month of the Rosary. Month of Respect Life (Pro-Life Movement).
- It is combined with other Mission Collection Feasts such as Operation Rice Bowl – and not necessarily in October.

How many church leaders know that the official Catholic Church *Ordo* states that the Mass for the Evangelization of Peoples can be used with special readings such as *Matthew 28:16-20*?

True, we have to read the signs of the times such as the influence of Covid, bankruptcy in some dioceses, etc. We have to research more the views of Young Adults, some of whom prefer the word "service" to "mission."

But the ideal is Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York Archdiocese, USA who says that if at all possible the Local Ordinary should celebrate World Mission Sunday in the cathedral. And Pope Francis is constantly reminding us that by virtue of our baptism we are all missionary disciples.

Who knows about these two chapters in our free, online Ebook on "SCCs in Eastern Africa:"

11. “Promoting the Missionary Outreach of SCCs in the AMECEA Region” (page 784 on)
12. “SCCs’ Involvement in the New Evangelization in Eastern Africa” (page 804 on).

I would have thought that Pope Francis' constant emphasis on mission and evangelization would make World Mission Sunday more prominent/noticeable/frontburner/in the headlines, but it hasn't happened.

A screenshot of a Zoom meeting grid showing seven participants in a 3x3 layout. The bottom-right cell is empty. The participants are:

- Top-left: Gerard (muted, hand icon), video off.
- Top-right: Phidelis Wamalwa (muted), video on.
- Middle-left: Juma (muted), video on.
- Middle-right: Alloys Nyakundi (video on, highlighted border).
- Bottom-left: stacy semben wandiema (muted), video on.
- Bottom-right: Arslan Nazir Khokhar (muted), video on.
- Bottom-right (smaller): Shaloon khokhar (muted), video on.

The bottom control bar includes: Unmute (muted), Stop Video (video off), Participants (14), Chat, and a partially visible Share button.

St. Agatha Joy Women's Training and Tailoring Group is the name of the sewing club of the women in our St. Kizito SCC in St. Austin's Parish in Nairobi, Kenya. Among its self-help and self-reliant projects is to make Deacon Stoles and Priest Stoles for Albany Diocese, New York, USA. The Coordinator of the Project, Deacon Ed Solomon, reports that the stole project to date has made \$5,621.00 for the women. This is a great success story. Despite many complications and set backs, it can be done!

Our evaluation is that it is very hard to "brand" World Mission Sunday as long as it is a floating date (next to last Sunday in October). Better to give it a specific, fixed date like Third Sunday in October.

World Youth Day is around the corner and preparations are already underway. Registration has already commenced and young people from different parts of the world can start registering for this event. I hope many young people will get an opportunity to attend this memorable event. Here are the sites that can provide more information about the event. <https://www.jmjyouth.com/wyd-faqs.html>

Today here at Maryknoll, NY, USA at 3 pm I joined 14 other Maryknoll priests and Brothers in a type of SCC for Lectionary-based Faith Sharing. We read the three Bible texts for next Sunday (31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, 30 October 2022) and applied them to our daily lives.

It is important to clarify the difference between:

Small Christian Communities

Basic Christian Communities

Base Christian Communities

Comments are welcome.

The word "base" indicates "from the grassroots" or in sociological terms the "base" of the society (the economically poor and marginalized). Base refers to the foundations, the roots of the social scale where people power can shake/influence the structures and established order from below. It highlights the preferential option for the poor in the context of Liberation Theology that so characterizes these communities. It has a different meaning than "basic." Many people wrongly equate "base" and "basic." Base communities is especially the name used in Latin America for small neighborhood groups in economically poor areas that meet weekly.

The word "ecclesial" emphasizes that these communities are in themselves "church" – church at the most local level. They are the first and fundamental nucleus of the church and the initial cell/unit of the ecclesial structures. It is constituted of members as one cell of the greater community. In some Latin American countries and in the Philippines they are like ecclesial chapels or ecclesial centers where the sacraments are celebrated. They go by names such as Mass Center, Chapel, Missionary Center and Zone (that refers to the physical building as well as the geographical area/location).

"Enlarge the Space of Your Tent:" Working Document for the Continental Stage," Synod 2021-2024: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission," General

Secretariat of the Synod, retrieved from the Synod Website, 29 October, 2022, [Documento-Tappa-Continentale-EN.pdf \(synod.va\)](#)

How are our SCCs participating in the Synodal Process? Please give examples. Do our SCCs act synodally? Do we listen to each other? Do we listen to the Holy Spirit? Are we walking together? Vote for "Sure way of making the best out of Pope Francis' Synodal Process" in our SCC Poll.

We follow the mantra *think globally, act locally*. Our St. Kizito Small Christian Community (SCC) in Nairobi, Kenya promotes care of the earth and ecology/environment concerns especially during Lent. On Good Friday I take an empty waste paper basket and walk around the perimeter of the Maryknoll Society compound in Nairobi. I collected stray paper, bags and plastic bottles, often stuck in the hedges. I fill at least one basket of trash. I am reminded of the German proverb: *If everyone sweeps in front of his or her house, the whole world will be clean.*

As we come to the close of October, 2022 as "Mission Month" how are we SCC members being missionary disciples and spreading the Gospel?

Bernard Mberere and I spend a lot of time on selecting these six choices in each poll. We have done careful research on, and analyzed feedback from, surveys, questionnaires, workshops, courses, interviews, personal conversations, articles, books, email messages, Facebook Pages, Zoom Faith Sharing and Gospel Sharing, visits to SCCs and conferences on SCCs. We have studied carefully the contemporary signs of the times such as the Covid-19 pandemic and pastoral changes in our parishes and dioceses such as the 2021-2024 Synodal Process. We have identified 1622 important characteristics or features of SCCs around the world mainly provided by Small Christian Community (SCCs) members themselves: 801 on the dynamics/process/principles/classifications of SCCs and 821 on the activities/content /outreach/practical action of SCCs. The poll uses the statement — "The best part of my Small Christian Community is... "— followed by six choices that are taken from these 1622 important characteristics or features of SCCs. These six choices reflect both the inner life and the public life of our SCC Model of Church. We change the poll every two months.

One of the choices in our Eighty-Second Round (November -- December, 2022) Poll is: "Lectionary-based faith sharing in a synodal style." What does this mean? First, there is a long period of silence after the reading of the Gospel to ask the question: What is God saying to us in this Bible passage? Second, when we share our lectionary-based faith-sharing/gospel-based faith-sharing, we don't just share our interpretation/our exegesis, we build on/add to what others have shared. This includes deeper listening to others in our SCC, not just thinking of what I am going to say.

A new expression for our SCC members: "digital discipleship" that means using social media for ministry and mission.

Slowly, slowly we are trying to develop a synodal spirit/style/way/attitude in our SCCs.

The current interest in our Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community's twice monthly online gatherings and Facebook Page comes from the desire to find concrete ways of attracting Young Adults to the Catholic Church. A CARA Research Study shows that 60% of Catholic Young Adults' Faith Community Activities in the United States are

outside the parish. How many of these activities are on social media and in the digital world? Many. Some of the popular social media are Zoom, WhatsApp, Twitter, Skype and Instagram.

Online *Lectio Divina* at the Baltimore Carmel on Zoom

Saturdays at 2 pm (Eastern Time – USA)

There is a commentary by a theologian or scripture scholar followed by small group discussions on the Gospel text of the following Sunday. Please note that you need to register for each session separately. The small group discussions are an integral part of the *Lectio Divina*. While there is an option on the registration form for you to opt-out of the small discussion groups, we really encourage your participation.

Register at: <https://www.baltimorecarmel.org/current-events>

“‘Enlarge the Space of Your Tent:’ Working Document for the Continental Stage,” Synod 2021-2024: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission,” General Secretariat of the Synod, retrieved from the Synod Website, 29 October, 2022, [Documento-Tappa-Continentale-EN.pdf \(synod.va\)](#)

Challenging question: Is the tent the Catholic Church or the world/creation?

No. 94. A particular source of suffering are those situations in which access to the Eucharist and to the other Sacraments is hindered or prevented by a variety of causes: there is a strong demand to find solutions to these forms of sacramental deprivation. For example, communities living in very remote areas are cited, or the use of charging fees for access to celebrations, which discriminates against the poorest. Many summaries also give voice to the pain of not being able to access the Sacraments experienced by remarried divorcees and those who have entered into polygamous marriages. There is no unanimity on how to deal with these situations: “Access to Holy Communion is denied to the divorced and remarried, and they expressed hurt at this exclusion. Some expressed the view that the Catholic Church should be more flexible, but others felt this practice should be upheld” (EC Malaysia).

NOTE: The term "sacramental deprivation" is similar to "Eucharistic famine/hunger/starvation."

Reminder about the Online Young Adults Seekers SCCs Gathering coming up on Wednesday 9 November. To join click: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/86345194432...> Passcode: seekers

Guest Facilitator: Prof. Rafael Luciani.

Topic: “Synodality”

Prof. Rafael Luciani is a Theologian, an Expert of the Theologian Commission of the Theologian Commission of the General Secretariat for the Synod of Bishops, and a full Professor at Boston College.

My experience with Prof. Rafael Luciani was great. I really learned a lot about synod and synodality. How I wish I could meet him again for more knowledge.

In tracing the origin of SCCs in Eastern Africa a very important book is: Marie-France Perrin Jassy, *Basic Communities in the African Churches*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973. It was an early Orbis Book. While it did not have a big sale, it has had a lot of

influence. Laurenti Magesa writes about its influence on the thinking of African theologians on ecclesiology and lay leadership. Also there is Marie-France Perrin Jassy, *Forming Christian Communities*, Kampala: Gaba Pastoral Paper No. 12, 1970.

A lay leader from Australia writes: "I think a focus on pastoral councils (whether parish or diocesan) as the locus for synodality in practice is a good one." This is excellent and hits the mark. The Synod Expert Rafael Luciani agrees with this. We have to challenge the resistance to these councils.

Helpful insight: "I also agree with the focus on pastoral councils. I was struck Rafael Luciani said Cardinal Grech is working with two canon lawyers to make two changes: make those councils both mandatory and deliberative (as distinct from merely consultative). One problem he hasn't mentioned though is the pretty crucial one concerning the "selection" of the council members. They need to be representative of the community they serve. As we all know, you can give all the power you want to such councils, but if membership selection remains in the hands of the clergy, then the dangers of them being mere echo chambers of whatever the priest/bishop want to hear remains.

Generally, "representation" is regarded as ensured primarily by means of free elections by all members of the community. So canon law needs three changes: on making those councils 1. mandatory, 2. deliberative, and 3. representative. As it happens, the church constitution we're proposing suggests a very similar model (see Articles 45-48 of the text here).

I suspect it is worth us insisting that councils be not just mandatory and deliberative but also representative, so as to minimize the risk that canon law is changed in such a way as to keep the possibility of the clergy abusing the system (as they've been doing by not making councils mandatory and deliberative). As a reminder, currently the membership of pastoral councils is determined by can. 512 and 536 of the CIC, which affirm 1. That it is up to the bishop to choose the "manner" in which members should be selected; and 2. That membership should "truly reflect the entire portion of the People of God".

"From the Synod on Synodality to the Synodalization of the Whole Church: Towards a New Ecclesial Reconfiguration in the Light of Synodality" by Rafael Luciani. Rafael Luciani (Synod-Synodality-Synodalization) Iglesia Viva 2021 (ENG).pdf

Luciani writes: "The experience of Base Ecclesial Communities has shown that communal discernment from below is an effective way to link the processes of decision making and decision taking because, while synodality occurs in the walking, the listening, and the meeting together, it is completed only by the discerning of decisions together."

Redemptah Mutie: "Rafael's insisted on the important role the SCCs are playing in this Synodal Process. In my current parish, that is KUCC, we did it so well. He insisted that people don't have to wait for the clergy to organize them but they can organize themselves. Although in my local Kenyan parish church the synodal thing was done poorly; very few people participated."

Alloys Nyakundi: "Rafael's insisted on the important role the SCCs/Base Ecclesial Communities are playing in this Synodal Process. He highlighted that people don't have to wait for bishops and priests to organize them but they can organize themselves through the Base Ecclesial Communities."

Gerhardt Gerard: “On Wednesday 9 November, I was lucky to be in attendance in our online meeting that was graced by Prof. Rafael, guest facilitator. In recent years, I've been coming across the 'synod' topic online on some random websites. But listening to Prof. Rafael explaining different definitions of synodality, the important role it plays in church at this age, et cetera, was such an enlightening experience. Actually, throughout the session I felt like he was just across the room sharing his wisdom. I was intrigued by his challenge to us that we shouldn't sit back and wait for invitation from our dioceses for us to be heard. Rather we should develop a document that airs our views on synodality, our concerns and contributions to the topic as Young Adult Seekers.”

The fact is that now it is no longer just the Catholic Church scrutinizing the signs of the times in the light of the Gospel. It is also the signs of the times — beginning with the voices of victims and survivors of abuse — scrutinizing the Catholic Church in the light of the Gospel. Food for thought. This is a challenging statement for our reflection and action.

The North American Forum for Small Christian Communities (NAFSCC) asks this challenging question: In light of the Synodal Process how do you see SCCs as a critical way to move the Catholic Church forward? Please give our answers here.

1. In Africa everyone talks about SCCs at the grassroots/on the grassroots, but it is uncertain how the views of SCC members are accepted and acted upon in what is still a conservative, clerical, hierarchical, patriarchal African Church.

The “Synodal Process” is described very well at the US Catholic Bishops’ Meeting going on in Baltimore, Maryland, USA this week. The bishops are recognizing that it’s also:

1. “about discernment,
2. about [small] group discussion,
3. about listening to one another,
4. about listening to the Holy Spirit.”

These are great photos from the St. Dominic SCC end-of-semester party and Father Joseph Healey's Farewell party at Kenyatta University in Nairobi. It was so wonderful to see young people with a lot of energy and enthusiasm. They have this event at the end of every semester to celebrate their achievements and say goodbye to one another. Thank you so very much Joe Healey for finding time to visit and give hope to the young people at Kenyatta University.











The energy and enthusiasm of the St. Dominic SCC members is an important sign of the future of the Catholic Church in Africa. That's indeed a true indicator of a brighter future in our church. May God bless and enable them keep the *Jumuiya* spirit alive. So exciting to

see young people living and practicing their faith through Small Christian Communities. First of all, active participation means that the mind and heart are awake, alert and engaged during such events. May God bless such young people. The young people are the future of humanity whether they belong to the church or are seekers of truth and justice for all. Let us make the world to be a conducive place for the future generation.

For those SCC members that do weekly Lectionary-based faith sharing, the Feast of Christ the King is the last Sunday of the Liturgical Year and important for reflection, review and planning. We can do a review of the past year and then start fresh in the Advent Season in a new Liturgical Year that is Year A -- Matthew.

What are our SCC members doing to prepare for the First Sunday of Advent (tomorrow, 27 November, 2022) and the new Liturgical Year A? How are we identifying, reading and responding to the contemporary signs of the times? Some answers:

1. Some of the ways to respond to the contemporary signs of the times may include: the use of technology and the internet to evangelize and form online faith communities; make donations to support those in need; and overall moving with the contemporary speed of change. For example, as Science ceaselessly seeks truth, Religion must ceaselessly seek the same truth by opening new paths such as more participation of laity in the church.
2. Good insights. We have to specify what this expression "more participation of laity in the church" really means. Otherwise some priests can turn it into a fund raising task/exercise in the SCC and in parish or a lot of busy service work of the laity. May synodality and the synodal process bring about more real participation of laity in the church especially in leadership and decision making.
3. One of the choices in our SCC Poll (<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>) is: "Spreads the Gospel." In this new Liturgical Year may our SCCs be missionary and reach out to others in love, compassion and service.
4. Hello Seekers. *1 Timothy 4:12*: As a young adult, this scripture has been my path finder. I feel it will inspire you to. Check it out. Be blessed 🙏 During this season of Advent may each Young Adult choose a scripture passage or a theme to reflect on and live by. This is very inspiring scripture. Let us continue finding the scripture that can accompany young people in their day-to-day struggles.

Bishop Charles Kasonde, Chairman of AMECEA, emphasized that in the process of synodality, the Holy Father designed a program starting with the religious members of the Catholic Church to the families, Small Christian Communities, outstations, the parishes, the deaneries, the dioceses, the nation, and now at a regional level there is a collection of synthesis which is yet to be engraved in the regional conferences.

“With sadness and pain we hereby inform you of the return to the heavenly Father of Cardinal Richard Baawobr which occurred on Sunday, 27 November 2022. Our confrere was taken by ambulance from the Missionaries of Africa Generalate in Rome to the Gemelli Hospital at 5.45 pm and we received the sad news at 6.25 pm. May Richard rest in the peace of his Lord whom he so generously served. On behalf of the bereaved Society our prayers and our thoughts go also to his family, to his diocese, his fellow bishops, to all his friends and acquaintances. Cardinal Richard Baawobr was a great supporter of SCCs and African culture. RIP.”

The results of the Synodal Process is still very Western: many words, documents, reports. The students at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya want to contribute singing and dancing from the African culture. Thus synodality is a way of life. This is why the Synodal Public Letter that Collins Ongoma is working on is very important. It mentions the singing and dancing culture at KU.

The term "Small Christian Community" is used differently in different local contexts. See this article on Religion in Qatar: Religion: November 23, 2022: "Qatar's Small Christian Community in the Shadow of the World Cup." The World Cup is now underway in Qatar, a conservative Muslim nation where the 200,000 Christian residents have limited freedom to practice their faith.

We had a wonderful session on SCCs today at Spiritan House in Nairobi with Mwanajumuiya [Joseph G. Healey](#). Through him I came to know about the Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community. This is a good example of sharing and collaboration in the SCC networking. Young adults, be they Spiritan seminarians or Kenyatta University students, have a lot to offer to the Catholic Church through SCCs. Oyee. I'm glad you had a wonderful session with one of our own *Mwanajumuiya* ("a youth from a long time ago"). Networking and collaboration are key in our SCCs and I hope you'll get time to attend our online gatherings. I always share information about our gatherings on this platform. Kindly share a photo of the SCCs session you had with *Mwanajumuiya*.

Certain publications take on new meaning and new importance with new situations and contexts. For example: *The Community Called Church*. Volume 5 of an Experimental Sourcebook for Religious Education, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, Spearhead No. 60, December, 1979. The chapter on SCCs is significantly entitled "The Small Christian Community as Basic Cell of the Church." The book explains "how the policy of building Small Communities as the most local cells of the church is solidly based on a vision of the church that is both new and old." The systematic theology teacher on the writing team, Father Brian Hearne, CSSp, is called one of the Theological Architects of SCCs in Eastern Africa.

AFRICA/NIGER - Basic Christian Communities, a simple tool for proclaiming the Gospel

Dosso (Agenzia Fides) - "I would like to tell you about our Basic Christian Communities which, it seems, normally operate in all the missions of the diocese except in Dosso", writes Father Rafael Casamayor from Niger. "We left last year with great commitment and determination. Every fortnight a group of Christians from a village meet in one of their homes to pray, read the Gospel and simply pray, commenting, exchanging ideas, experiences, talking about Christian life, supporting each other in a Muslim society that generally does not make it easy to express oneself" (see Fides, 7/1/2022).

"It is not an easy path, since we all have very different points of view - adds the priest of the Society for African Missions - but we are slowly managing to 'break the ice'. People seem happy to be able to exchange viewpoints, sharing and being in each other's communities" (BCC) as a method and instrument of evangelization and organization of parish life. "In Dosso there are five and they correspond to as many sectors of the city. The diocese has been doing this for a few years. An attempt was also made in Dosso but it seems that it did not give the expected result, now we are trying again," says Father Casamayor.

"This method and organization of Christian life comes to us from Latin America and has found its echo in several African countries with considerable success. I had the opportunity to use it when I was on mission in Banikani, Benin, to launch it in Gaya and now in Dosso." Our Christian community is quite heterogeneous, most are immigrants of different ethnicities

from Benin, Togo or Burkina, and although many of them were born here, they keep their ties and their spirit rooted in their origins. In Niger, explains the missionary, most workers, blacksmiths, masons, carpenters, mechanics, are Beninese and live on unimaginable sacrifices. The rest is secondary for them. However, by insisting, encouraging in a thousand ways and showing patience and humor whenever possible, they seem to "adapt", to make the sign of the cross... The other day, we spoke of the Gospel of the previous Sunday, of the beatitudes: "Blessed are the poor...those who weep...those who hunger and thirst for justice"...and immediately we stopped at the persecuted. Father, Abel, a good blacksmith who presides over the community, told me, we are persecuted because we are Christians, because we don't pray, we don't fast, because we are pagans. That's what they say, it bothers them that we are not Muslims and they try to convert us at all costs by offering us work, business, promising us gold and anything that comes to mind". "It's true, adds another, but not all of them, there are those who respect us, those who understand our way of living the faith and some even call themselves hypocrites.

It is not easy to be a Christian in Niger, especially after the growing influence of jihadist movements or the burning of churches in January 2015. "We find the development of grassroots Christian communities very positive, where Christians find support, solidarity, encouragement and even joy when they meet with their families, different families, and share their faith." (RC/AP) (Agenzia Fides, 14/2/2023)

Good SCCs Resource:

"Ponder: Contemplative Bible Study" (2022) accompanies all hearers and preachers of the Word of God as they pray with and ponder the Sunday readings throughout the 2022 -- 2023 Liturgical Year in the Catholic Church. Everything needed for a rich experience of Lectio Divina and biblical exploration is provided: the full text of the Sunday readings, concise commentary, engaging reflections, and clear guidance on how to use this resource alone or with a group. This volume guides readers through the Year A Lectionary 2022 - 2023 (St. Matthew's Gospel).

Order from Liturgical Press:



Example of SCCs in a Campus Ministry Program at a private research university:

Spring 2023 Small Group Registration at Duke University

Start the Spring Semester, 2023 off right and find community!

We have a variety of small groups available for Duke University in Durham, North Carolina, USA undergraduates, graduates, and guests of the Duke Catholic Center (DCC). These small groups allow space for participants to explore the Gospel and grow in their faith. If offered, do you have a background/cultural or interest-based affinity small group you'd like to be a part of? **NOTE:** Lectionary-based faith sharing and *Lectio Divina* are choices.

For those who want to follow the 1 - 6 March, 2023 African Synodal Continental Gathering in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, this is an excellent website:

Africa 2023 Synodal Continental Assembly Website
[Africa - 2023 Synodal Continental Assembly | \(synod2023.org\)](https://synod2023.org)

Portal to Seven 2023 Synodal Continental Assemblies
 [\(synod2023.org\)](https://synod2023.org)

Announcement:

Join us on Tuesday, March 21, 2023 at 6pm ET for an inter-generational panel discussion on Small Christian Communities (SCCs) sponsored by the online journal "Today's American Catholic" (TAC). Panel participants will include Father Joe Healey, a CCRI member and Maryknoll priest with decades of experience working with Small Christian Communities; Kevin Ahern, an author, editor, and professor of religious studies at Manhattan College; and Paulina Halley, a recent graduate of Yale University and Small Christian Community participant. Panelists will discuss "God's Quad: Small Faith Communities on Campus and Beyond" (Orbis Books, 2018), edited by Kevin Ahern and Christopher Derige Malano and featuring a contribution from Father Joe Healey. Registration is required and is available here: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/8121212121>.

For additional information, please email: editor@todaysamericancatholic.org.

Witness of American Dominican Sister of Peace Annie E Killian (Yale University undergraduate '11, PhD '19):

“SCCs were a formative part of my experience at St. Thomas More (STM) both as an undergraduate (Yale College 2011) and graduate student (GSAS 2019) in New haven, Connecticut, USA. I joined an SCC in the spring semester of my first year in college and participated most semesters after that, in different groups. Through SCCs, I learned to read the Gospels to hear how God is speaking to me, right now, in the everyday circumstances of my life. It’s funny to me, looking back, that I had never before been taught that sacred reading draws us into a personal encounter with God and into intimate communion with one another as we share faith and life together. As an undergrad, fellow SCC members became my role models and friends with whom I remain close. As a graduate student, SCCs supported me through my mother’s death and my family’s mourning. The experience of communal prayer and study ignited within me a passion for breaking open the Word and sharing the fruits of my contemplation that ultimately led me to discern a vocation to religious life and enter the Dominican Sisters of Peace. I think the SCC model draws us into the “synodal” way of being church, journeying together in faith, that Pope Francis is calling us to embrace.”

Are you doing your homework on World Youth Day (WYD)? This year 2023 it takes place in Lisbon, Portugal. The first WYD took place in 1986 in Rome, and was later held in Buenos Aires (1987), Santiago de Compostela (1989), Czestochowa (1991), Denver (1993), Manila (1995), Paris (1997), Rome (2000), Toronto (2002), Cologne (2005), Sydney (2008), Madrid (2011), Rio de Janeiro (2013), Krakow (2016), and Panama (2019).

From the Synodality Resource Team (SRT) for Africa:

The Synodality Formation Module, after it is completed, will be used in various formation programs in schools, in seminaries, in Small Christian Communities (SCCs), and in all other communities inside, and even outside structures of the Catholic Church. Meanwhile, Bishop Willybard Lagho of Kenya's Malindi Diocese, has called for the rethinking of church structures, such as SCCs that he says have been presented as "exclusive clubs", locking out many Christians who do not feel like belonging to such communities. "Just how free are Catholics to attend, or not to attend SCCs? I believe that there are many good Catholics who, because they don't feel like joining these structures, end up leaving the church," he said. In SCCs, members who lose their loved ones are entitled to some contribution, the Kenyan Catholic Bishop shared, adding, "To me, this is not the true spirit of evangelization."

This SCCs Facebook Page is a forum for dialog and discernment. When SCCs started in Eastern Africa in the 1970s we discussed at length the danger of the "elitism" that the bishop talks about. This has to be challenged at its roots.

Please pray for and with our friend Mwanajumuiya Father John Siyumbu, MM who is a Kenyatta University graduate and a Maryknoll missionary priest. He is presently discerning a mission assignment to Guatemala, a country in Central America.

Let us pray that many Young Adults join our Online Panel Discussion on "Small Christian Communities on Campus and Beyond" sponsored by Today's American Catholic (TAC) on Tuesday, 21 March, 2023. Really looking forward to this panel discussion. I hope the discussion will have a good number of representation from Africa.

Suggestion from Tony Giuriceo in New Jersey, USA: Promote Alumni SCCs -- in person, online and hybrid. These can be coordinated with Alumni Societies of various colleges and universities. For more info see the book Kevin Ahern and Christopher Derige Malano, (eds.), *God's Quad: Small Faith Communities on Campus and Beyond* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018).

From a Catholic Online News Service:

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are a big deal in the Catholic Church in Africa. In fact, it is considered the basic unit of the Church on the continent. Antoine Cardinal Kambanda, the 64-year-old native of Rwanda's Catholic Archdiocese of Kigali has devoted his work to growing SCCs.

Let our SCC members reflect on the difference between “active silence” and “passive silence.” When we originally created the SCC Poll on our SCCs Website we put the choices related to silence under “the dynamics/process/principles/classifications of SCCs.” But now we put them under “the activities/content/outreach/practical action of SCCs.” Silence can be an active process especially when it involves deeper listening to God such as in the silence after reading the *Gospel*. Step 7 in our weekly SCC gathering is: “Silence. Listen to what God is saying/what God wants to tell us in the *Gospel* passage. This period of silence is not wasted time or empty time. It can be a time of deeper listening and deeper reflection.”

May SCC members respond to Pope Francis’s call to reflect on the Gospel more during this Lenten Season 2023. Let us be creative and:

1. Read and reflect on the *Gospel* text.
2. Listen to and reflect on the *Gospel* on podcasts.
3. Look at and reflect on videos of the *Gospel* stories and teachings (such as *The Chosen*).

There are two models of Catholic Retreats or Recollection Days. Both are important and both are necessary. First is the traditional, “preached” retreat. The retreatants listen to a series of talks (“conferences”) on spiritual topics. Second, is the Small Christian Community/Synodal Style retreat that is more interactive and participatory. Retreatants reflect and share in small groups on the Bible and spiritual topics.

An example of the second model as a one-day Recollection Day can include the following: A Pastoral Theological Reflection (PTR) Session based on the Gospel story in Mark 6: In verse 7 Jesus sends out the 12 apostles two by two to preach and to heal. Then in verse 30: “The apostles rejoined (gathered together with) Jesus and reported all they had done and taught” (also found in Luke 9:10). This is the “See,” “Discern” and “Act” process or methodology starting with the apostles’ mission experience. Then Jesus says to them in verse 31: “Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while.” Silence is an important part of the reflection process. After a period of rest and reflection the apostles start a new action. Online Ebook -- See page 1194 of our free Online Ebook: *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*

<http://smallchristiancommunities.org/building-the-church.../>

http://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf

smallchristiancommunities.org

smallchristiancommunities.org

We continue with our Forum on "How to Prepare a Sunday Homily." Welcome to your contribution.

- I wish every Deacon and Priest Homilist would meet with a group of lay people regularly each week to break open the scriptures. This is required in Lansing Diocese, Michigan, USA.
- I want to do this in our parish in Albany, New York, USA. A group of women meet regularly each week to break open the scriptures and they’ve invited me to sit with them. It is a wonderful way to get different perspectives, especially from women on these scriptures, so saturated by male understanding.

- In preparing my Easter Homily I consulted about 15 parishioners in our Christ the King Parish in New Jersey, USA. This is how we prepare homilies in Africa. It is a community effort especially through our weekly SCCs. Let's see what folks remember a week later.
- Be creative and challenging to the listening audience.
- The priest preparing together with the People of God in a synodal way/in a synodal style/in a synodal manner.
- Here are some examples from our free ebook on "SCCs in Eastern Africa:"

American Maryknoll missionary priest Father Herb Gappa, MM, a parish priest in Bariadi Parish in Shinyanga Diocese, Tanzania, tried to visit three neighborhood SCCs in his mainly rural parish during the middle of the week, for example, Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons. By listening carefully to the SCC members' reflections on the Scripture readings of the following Sunday, he found that over half of his Sunday homily was already "written" for him.

The priests in St. Theresa's Parish, Eastleigh in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya joined with lay members of the parish to use the Lumko "Group Response Method" of Gospel Sharing (pioneered by Lumko, South Africa) to prepare their Sunday homilies together.

A deacon in Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish, South B in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya said that he "decided to join St. Clara SCC in Hazina Estate in order to prepare my homilies based on the sharing of life experiences of the people."

With all the discussion on Artificial Intelligence (AI) these days, I asked "What is a Small Christian Community?" in my OpenAI Account with ChatGPT and got this interesting answer:

"A Small Christian Community (SCC) is a group of Christians, usually ranging from 6 to 12 people, who gather regularly in homes or other community spaces to pray, study the *Bible*, and support each other in their faith journeys. SCCs are often seen as a way to build stronger relationships between members of a larger church community and to foster a deeper sense of community and belonging. The focus of SCCs is usually on sharing and reflecting on personal experiences of faith, rather than on doctrinal or theological debates. SCCs can be found in various Christian denominations, including Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox churches."

The main aspect missing is the social and mission outreach/the practical service to others.

Happy Feast Day of our Patron Saint of our SCC -- St. Isidore of Seville -- 4 April, 2022. Prolific writer. Initially a poor student, he gave the problem over to God and become of the most learned men of his time. He died in Seville, Spain on 4 April. 636. He became the leading candidate for Patron of Computer Users and the internet in 1999. It is suggested that we pray to St. Isidore before logging onto the internet. One prayer includes the line: "We beseech you that, through the intercession of Saint Isidore, bishop and doctor, during our

journeys through the internet we will direct our hands and eyes only to that which is pleasing to you and treat with charity and patience all those souls whom we encounter."

NEW POST ANNOUNCEMENT: "Visit to the Campus Ministry Program at Ave Maria University in Florida, USA"

By Joseph G. Healey

Two Maryknoll priest friends of mine and I visited the Campus Ministry Program at Ave Maria University, a Catholic university in Ave Maria, Florida, USA on Friday, 24 March, 2023. The main purpose was to learn about a Model of Campus Ministry that has not been in our Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Research so far – coming from the conservative, traditional, devotional side of the Catholic Church. This is part of "deeper listening" to other views and experiences in the "Synodal Process." Read More.....

The *Bulletin* of St. John XXIII Church/Parish in Fort Myers, Florida, USA includes the reference to two SCCs: The "Men's Gospel Forum" on Mondays and the "Opening the the Word" gathering called "Your Journey into the Sunday Readings" on Tuesdays. This SCC uses the Scripture readings of the next Sunday with a video and shared reflections. It is hybrid. Participants can view online *Bible* materials 24/7.

In Nairobi, Kenya my favorite part of Holy Week Liturgical Events was always the Outdoor Way of the Cross coordinated by the SCCs in St. Austin Parish. Today both the front pages of the *Wall Street Journal* and the Newark Star Ledger has a dramatic photo of 2,000 Catholics crossing the 1.3 mile Brooklyn Bridge yesterday on Good Friday as part of the outdoor "Way of the Cross." This Lenten tradition had readings, reflections, and music from the Good Friday liturgy throughout the "Stations of the Cross."

When a parishioner at our Christ the King Parish Mass in Paterson Diocese, New Jersey, USA wrote: "This morning the mass was wonderful. Your interpretations and involvement of us in the discussions were great." I replied:

"I don't deserve your positive comments. I try to encourage participation and involvement. This is "a way of life" in our Small Christian Community Model of Catholic Church in Eastern Africa. We call it a "Shared Homily" or a "Participatory Homily." My one regret/failure is that folks remain scattered all over the church. When I ask them to come up front and form a 'little community" they don't respond. I should joke: "Come up higher. Don't worry. There is no collection today."

During this Easter Season our Small Christian Community Website says it best: Eighty-Fourth Round: "The best part of my Small Christian Community is...: "Reignites our faith through reading and reflecting on the Gospel."

Small Christian Communities – Small Christian Communities

<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>

Let us have the zeal, the relit faith and the excitement of the two disciples at Emmaus (Cleophas and his wife!!!) as they returned to Jerusalem in the dark on fire with the love and spirit of the Risen Christ.

Along a similar vein, see FaithND's comment on the 12 April, 2023 Gospel: "Despite having already walked seven miles to Emmaus, they turn right back around to make the

journey back to Jerusalem. The disciples were transformed by their burning hearts, knowing Jesus' appearance was too great to keep to themselves. I can imagine the disciples' journey back to Jerusalem, walking purposefully, excitedly discussing what they had seen, and anticipating sharing the news. Jesus calls us into a deeper relationship with him in the Eucharist. How do we allow the Eucharist to transform our hearts and inform how we live our daily lives? May we have a renewed spirit to draw nearer to Jesus in the Eucharist this Easter season, and may we keep our hearts open to receiving Jesus' love, allowing this love to spring us into action."

The American woman theologian Ilia Delio writes on the meaning of Easter: "The experience of Jesus raised from the dead ignited his disciples with a new fire of hope; the experience of Jesus, alive in a new way, set the world ablaze with an evocative love." In our SCCs Model of Church we sit in a circle during our weekly gatherings to read and reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday. This is significant as we read this report about the newly formed committee tasked with organizing the upcoming 2023 and 2024 synod meetings in Rome: "The committee will also be involved with other planning matters, like the retreat that will take place ahead of the synod, and even practical matters, like how the more than 300 participants will be seated during the synod. (There was hope that they might sit at round tables rather than in traditional stadium-style seating or lecture hall seating in the Vatican's synod hall.

From Ronald Sunguti: "The sitting around is very significant to us as one family equal before God. It should be encouraged because it empowers each member present to feel loved and considered. It gives each person chance to contribute equally without feeling that he/she is less important or less. It is a good model for the family of God."

Are you a Catholic who wants to do something more than just participate in Sunday mass every week? Are you interested in learning more about the Bible? One option is to participate in a weekly Lectionary-based Faith Sharing Small Christian Community that reads and reflects on the Gospel of the following Sunday and applies it to our daily lives. If you are interested in

- Joining an existing weekly SCC (in person, online or hybrid).
- or
- Starting your own weekly SCC.
- or
- Learning more about SCCs.

please go to

Mikroi -- Today's American Catholic (TAC) Initiative on Small Christian Communities Website

Mikroi - Today's American Catholic ([todaysamericancatholic.org](https://www.todaysamericancatholic.org))
<https://www.todaysamericancatholic.org/mikroi/>

Mikroi: Our Today's American Catholic (TAC) SCC Initiative
<https://www.todaysamericancatholic.org/mikroi/>

Mikroi (μικρός) is a key term in Matthew's gospel that means "little ones" or "the least of these." As we thought about the intentions of Small Christian Communities and our SCC initiative, the word seemed to embody our vision of the church of the future—one that,

as Pope Francis has stated, “will become smaller, lose many privileges, be humbler and more authentic and find energy for what is essential.”

We're pleased to debut the web page for "Mikroi," our SCC initiative.

<https://www.todaysamericancatholic.org/mikroi/>

Here you'll find background information, news and articles, and additional resources, as well as information on how to join or form a small Christian community through TAC's online platform or in your own parish or location. We hope you'll be inspired to participate—Small Christian Communities serve as “training grounds” to inaugurate the next era of the of the church that will be, in Francis’s words, “more spiritual, poorer and less political; a Catholic Church of the little ones.”



[todaysamericancatholic.org](https://www.todaysamericancatholic.org)

[Mikroi - Today's American Catholic](#)

[Information about our small Christian community initiative.](#)

*North American Final Document for the Continental Stage of the 2021-2024 Synod:
For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission*

North-American-Final-Docment_EN.pdf (synod.va)

https://www.synod.va/.../North-American-Final-Docment_EN...

Using the Search Feature (ctrl + f) here are the number of references to specific words as follows:

12 – Jesus

30 -- Christ

3 -- Jesus Christ

Also Risen Christ, Risen Son.

22 – Holy Spirit

71 – Spirit

32 – communion

11 – participation

40 -- mission

2 – community

1 -- local community
 14 – small
 7 – small groups
 12 – small group
 124 – group
 20 – discernment
 12 -- dialogue
 18 -- women
 12 -- young people
 3 – youth

www.synod.va

The general term "small group" is very common in North America and is used in different ways. We prefer the specific term "Small Christian Community" in Africa.

"Evaluation of National Small Christian Community (SCC) Organizations in the USA:"

1. What have the successful SCC organizations done right?

a. RENEW International, Plainfield, New Jersey has a successful working economic/business model. Sale of English and Spanish SCC materials/products printed and online. Offers SCC Workshops (in-person, online, hybrid) with facilitating staff for hire.

<http://www.renewintl.org>

b. Office of Evangelization and Adult Faith Formation in San Bernadino Diocese, California. <https://www.sbdiocese.org> Sale of English and Spanish SCC materials printed and online. For a Case Study go to page 41 of "Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment." **NOTE:** The Office of Small Faith Communities closed because of budget cuts and the ministry is now folded in under the Ministry Formation Institute.

2. Reasons for the failure/closing/dormancy of the other SCC organizations.

Lack of:

1. Money. Sources include: Donations/Contributions. Subsidy. Subscription Fee. Official Grants. Gala. Real Estate Rental. Sale of products printed and online. Online Fund Raising. Loans. Endowments. End of year appeals. Legacies. Wills. Inheritance. Direct Mail Appeal.

2. Younger Leaders/Personnel. Scott Appleby's insight on the lack of young SCC leaders.. Danger of a charismatic founder/leader dying or retiring.

3. Vision/Creativity. Community values are often not a priority in USA culture and in the Catholic Church. Americans protect their independence and privacy. Middle class white Americans do not like the vulnerability/openness of Small Faith Sharing Communities.

4. Specific Focus/Niche.

"Signs of the Times factors:" Sexual Abuse Payments. Effects of Covid. Digital World Changes.

For a list of National Small Christian Community (SCC) Organizations in the USA go to page 183 of *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*.

The Catholic Church in Brazil has always been an inspiration for its CEBs Model of Church. The solemn opening session of the 60th General Assembly of the National Conference of Bishops of Brazil (CNBB) will be held on Wednesday, April 19 at the Congress Center of the National Shrine of Aparecida. The assembly will last until April 28 and will consist of 22 working sessions. One of the assembly's topics is "Basic Ecclesial Communities."

The President of the CNBB Archbishop Oliveira de Azevedo believes that one of the most important aspects for the Catholic Church around the world will be the commitment to synodality. The Brazilian Bishops' Conference, which already sees itself as an expression of synodality, since it brings together the many contributions of the Brazilian episcopate and counts on the participation of ordained evangelizers and lay Christians, "must continue to advance along this synodal path. This means continuously intensifying our services to the many small faith communities across the country and encourage wider participation, with particular attention to women's participation."

According to the Brazilian Bishops' Conference, the Catholic Church in Brazil currently has a total of 326 active bishops and 157 bishops emeritus. There are a total of 219 dioceses, 45 archdioceses and 7 prelatures. (SL) (Agenzia Fides, 18/4/2023)

North American Center for Marianist Studies

<https://www.nacms.org>

"The Best of Quest: Liturgical Year A"

See Third Sunday of Easter --Year A

https://www.nacms.org/.../files/Third_Sunday_of_Easter_A.pdf

The 2021 - 2024 Synodal Process is evaluating and updating guidelines for Parish Pastoral Councils. This is not news. Already in 2010 there were recommendations: "Recommendations for Parish Pastoral Councils (2010 CARA Report on "Best Practices for Catholic Pastoral and Finance Councils")"

1. Leadership should be shared.
2. Include prayer and Faith Sharing as part of the agenda at every meeting. Their importance to a Parish Pastoral Council cannot be overstated. When included at the beginning of the meeting, these activities set the tone for the entire meeting.

At the Press Conference in Rome on Friday, 20 April, 2023 Sister Nathalie presented the "Report of the Synodal Continental Task Force" and emphasized "that the strong experience of Small Christian Communities/Base Ecclesial Communities in Asia, Africa and Oceania is an experience of synodality."

One choice in our SCC Poll (<https://smallchristiancommunities.org>) is "Synodality is the true spirit of a SCC." At the big Synod Gathering in Rome in October, 2023 there will be 10 voting lay delegates from the African Continent -- half women and several Young People. Let us hope that they present the experiences of the SCCs Model of Church in Africa.

One choice in our SCCs Poll in the Eighty-Fourth Round is: "The best part of my Small Christian Community is... "Praying together for special intentions." Cardinal Berhaneyesus D. Souraphiel CM Metropolitan Catholic Archbishop of Addis Abeba, Ethiopia writes: "We are praying for peace and stability in our neighbor country Sudan."

To a friend: "Thank you for the first public donation of \$200 to my special Facebook Fundraiser: ""Let us join hands and help four Kenyan Catholic Young Adults (two young women and two young men) with Travel Scholarships to go to World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal in August, 2023." If you would like to donate to this cause please give to this Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/donate/617287020289859/617287026956525/>

May all SCC members pray for:

Synod of Bishops on "Synodality" on the theme "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, Mission," Vatican/Rome, Italy, 4-29 October, 2023.

Formally opened by Pope Francis in October 2021, the synod is a multi-stage process that began with a year of discernment/ consultation at the diocesan level, continued with a year of discernment/consultation at the continental level, and will culminate in two Rome-based gatherings in October, 2023 and October, 2024. This year's Rome-based gathering will mark the first time that women, and laypeople generally, are official delegates and have the right to vote.

"Let us hope that some of these lay delegates are active members of their SCCs on the grassroot level"... "Finally gotten there! We pray for success and serious scrutiny into some of the challenges that laity and SCCs are facing in their journey of faith."

My 85th Birthday Party at my brother's home in New Vernon, New Jersey, USA on Sunday, 30 April, 2023 was really an intergenerational/multigenerational SCC. 11 people from three generations from myself down to my 10-year-old grandniece Cara Healey. This same SCC has Sunday Zoom Masses with other members of our extended family. So we are active both as a social and a spiritual/religious SCC.

We invite members of this SCC to choose its specific name. It may be a Saint's name, an extended family name, a cultural name, a ministry name, a nickname, etc. The 12 members present (7 --1st Generation, 3 -- 2nd Generation, 2 -- 3rd Generation) choose the name of Healey--Hagerty Extended Family SCC.

ANNOUNCEMENT: It is important that we continue to evaluate our SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa so we can make it better. Please vote in the current polls.

Eighty-Fifth Round: The best part of my Small Christian Community is:
(May, 2023 – June, 2023):

1. Value of listening to the Gospel in our current Synodal Process.
2. Silent periods in our gatherings.
3. Critical way to move the Catholic Church forward.
4. Daily prayer in our gatherings plays a key role during the Synodal Process.
5. Thanking God and celebrating our 50 Year SCCs Anniversary in Eastern Africa.
6. Privileged place to experience family spirit, Synodality and outreach to others.

Vote at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>

We made these six choices after a lot of discernment, discussion and reading the “signs of the times” in Eastern Africa today. Priorities of the SCC Model of Church are highlighted. Also we edited the wording of the six choices to make them more user friendly. Happy voting. Feedback is welcome.

I voted for: "2. Silent periods in our gatherings." Silence is very important after the reading of the Gospel at Mass, after Communion at Mass ("Eucharist" comes from the Greek word meaning "thanksgiving") and in the gatherings of the Synodal Process.

The Catholic Church of the future in Ireland will be composed of “little groups that come together to pray, to celebrate the Eucharist together, and to reach out to those in need”, according to homelessness campaigner Father Peter McVerry SJ. He made his comments after addressing the Association of Catholics in Ireland on the subject, “Where Have All the Young People Gone?”

This is so close to *Acts of the Apostles* Chapter 2: "42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

How do the resources on our SCC Website promote the "Synodal Process?" Here is a concrete example: In our online Ebook *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* on [Academia.edu](https://www.academia.edu) someone did a Search for "Woman's Role in Leadership Positions in Church Africa."

Interesting conversation with an American Oratorian Priest (congregation of St. John Henry Newman) in Brooklyn, New York USA on Saturday, 6 May, 2023. In his ministry these days he is visiting Catholic High Schools in Brooklyn Diocese to meet with graduating seniors to discuss their key transition to College/University life in Fall, 2023. The priest is emphasizing the importance of connecting to Campus Ministry Activities and Programs at Newman Centers (secular, private and public colleges) and Catholic Centers (Catholic Colleges) to nourish the Young Person's ongoing Catholic faith life on campus including mass, *Bible* Study, Small Faith-Sharing Communities and service/outreach programs. He himself appreciated the Newman Center at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania, USA where he went to college.

Clyde Christofferson and Joe Keyes from the NOVA COMMUNITY in Virginia. USA say: "These are early days in a long term effort to revitalize the Synodal Process. We should gird our loins for the long term, maintaining our focus on the Spirit. If we persist in the process of listening to the Spirit through one another – we are being church, we are being synodal, we are walking together. Each of us has roots in Small Communities on the periphery of the Institutional Catholic Church. These Small Communities are where the Spirit works."

Today's American Catholic (TAC) Website
<https://www.todaysamericancatholic.org>

is building an important webpage called:

Mikroi – TAC’s Initiative on Small Christian Communities (SCCs)
<https://www.todaysamericancatholic.org/mikroi/>

So far it has a growing, expanding section on the right hand side called “ADDITIONAL RESOURCES” that includes:

- Documents
- Organizations
- Colleges and Universities

Additions are welcome.

Prayers please for a Zoom Gathering to take place on Thursday, 11 May, 2023. It bring together people from the Loyola’s Institute for Ministry (LIM) at Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA and people from the AMECEA SCCs Network in Eastern Africa to discern issues such as the development of the SCCs Model of Church, SCCs networking, Young Adult Ministry and the 2021-2024 Synodal Process. One of the choices in our SCCs Poll is: "Daily prayer in our gatherings plays a key role during the Synodal Process." Vote at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org>

From Michael Brough: "Many blessings for a fruitful synodal dialogue. May the Holy Spirit strengthen the important bonds between LIM and AMECEA and may Small Christian Communities continue to flourish as a result."

I think we can learn more from, and appreciate more, our histories. Take Orbis Books as an example. The book -- Bernard Lee and Michael Cowan wrote *Conversation, Risk, and Conversion: The Inner & Public Life of Small Christian Communities* published by Orbis Books at Maryknoll, NY in 1997 -- has had a big influence on the development of SCCs worldwide. Even though it is out of print, it is still used as a textbook in two Online LIM Courses: the “Inner Life of Small Christian Communities” and the “Public Life of Small Christian Communities.” It is one of the textbooks sent as an electronic copy to students throughout the world. Hopefully it can be reprinted.

Special Prayers please:

The Ordinary Council of the General Secretariat of the Synod approved the "Working Document" for the first session of the Synod on Synodality to take place from 4-29 October, 2023, as well as the methodology of the assembly. The document, to be published in early June, 2023, will guide discernment at the first gathering of the General Assembly in October, 2023. The assembly will meet for the second part of its deliberations in October, 2024.

This Facebook Page serves as a Forum to reflect on and discern the Synodal Process and various Synodal Reports. Rene Reid says: "In several breakout sessions we recognized and promoted [Small Christian Communities](#) (SCCs) as an official part of the structure of the Catholic Church. While was brought up several times, it was not even mentioned in the North American Continental Synodal Synthesis Report."

During our conversations here at Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA I have put together this List especially related to Young Adults:

New Synodal/Synodal Process Language/Vocabulary (alphabetically):

Deeper listening
 Discern rather than Judge
 Discernment, Dialogue and Consultation rather than Discussion
 Gathering rather than Meeting
 Global South rather than Developing Countries
 Lectionary-based Faith Sharing
 Local Church rather than Particular Church
 Networking rather than Communications
 Sacred Listening
 Service/Outreach rather than Mission
 Small Community rather than Small Group. **NOTE:** A special discernment is needed over the term “cohort.”
 Spiritual Conversation
 Synodal Church
 Synodal Way of Being Church/Synodal Way of Life
 Walking Together rather than Synodality (Young Adults have asked Pope Francis not to use churchy language)
 World centric/world-centered) rather than Church Centric/Church-centered and Ecclesial Centric/Ecclesial-centered.
 Working Document rather than (*Instrumentum Laboris* Young Adults have asked Pope Francis not to use Latin)

NOTE: Some of these words/terms can be controversial.

Comments are welcome. Additions are welcome.

Please share with anyone you think is interested.

Please congratulate and pray for Father Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator SJ (Bator) who has just been appointed to the position of Dean of the Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University in California, USA at the rank of full professor with tenure. One friend wrote: "I hope we will enjoy spreading Small Christian Communities with him and the student theologians."

Our whole SCC extended family congratulates Kenyan Loretto Sister Jane Frances Mulongo, IBVM on getting her Master’s Degree of Pastoral Studies with an area of concentration in Small Christian Community Formation at the graduation at Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA on 13 May, 2023. Hongera. Pongeza.

“New Post Announcement: Brief Timeline of the Long History Between LIM and AMECEA”

By Joseph G. Healey

NOTE: We are grateful for the 35-year close working relationship and friendship between LIM (Loyola’s Institute for Ministry) and AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa). Praise be to God. Sadly most people do not know this

history. Together I hope we can appreciate more, and learn more, from our long history. I hope we can get to know each other even better.

The facilitator of a weekly SCC gathering has to prepare well especially in understanding the Catholic Church's Liturgical Year. For example, on Sunday, 21 May 2023 we have a choice between two different masses with different readings:

1. Ascension Sunday.
2. Seventh Sunday of Easter.

The Moderator/Coordinator of our St. Isidore Online SCC could decide by himself or herself or better, as Mwanajumuiya Alloys Nyakundi has done, leave it to all our SCC members to decide. This means all of us studying the plan of the Catholic Church's Liturgical Year ahead of time (by the way we are in Year A in the Sunday Cycle) and reading the Gospels of the two choices ahead of time.

In our SCC Poll the Eighty-Fifth Round states: The best part of my Small Christian Community is... One choice is: "Value of listening to the Gospel/*Bible* in our current Synodal Process."

Mass on Sunday, 21 May, 2023 is the Mass of the Ascension. The readings are:

First Reading: Acts of the Apostles 1: 1-11 (my mantra: "until the day he was taken up")
 Gospel: Matthew 28: 16-20 (my mantra: "I am with you always, even until the end of the world/the end of the age")

In our SCC Lectionary based Faith Sharing one creative way is as follows: During the silence after the reading of the Gospel draw a picture of the Ascension in your imagination and then share it during the Shared Reflection or the Shared Homily.

Feedback is welcome.

Using the "Synodal Process" we build on/follow up what the previous speaker has said, not just share our independent, pre-prepared view.

Anthony Makunde at a Catholic Care for Children (CCC) Conference in Nairobi, Kenya: "We (AMECEA region) are joining hands with the Universal Church being aware of the structures that the Catholic Church has put in place. The conferences in the region have developed policies for safeguarding children and there are also safeguarding officers in the conferences as the region carry out capacity building to pastoral agents. AMECEA has the advantage of having Small Christian Communities (SCCs) where the church in general can be rooted."

For those who want to pray earnestly and distribute widely this important prayer:

GOLDEN JUBILEE PRAYER FOR THE COMMEMORATION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY (1973 -- 2023) OF BUILDING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH THROUGH SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES (SCCs) IN THE AMECEA REGION

Gracious and loving God, we give you thanks for the gift of our faith. As we joyfully commemorate 50 years of fulfilling the experience of "Small Christian Communities (SCCs)" as "a new way of being church," we recall and give thanks to the founding bishops, who out

of their love for Jesus, your Son and the Catholic Church, generously introduced this new pastoral model of the church.

God our Father, as AMECEA celebrates and looks to its future, we pray that the fruits of the Synod on Synodality (2021 -2024) find fulfilment through reinvigorated SCCs. Enkindle in us the spirit of listening, discernment and communion for active participation as we journey together in the mission of evangelization. Gracious God, strengthen us in our faith, hope, and charity so that the seeds of Christian discipleship experienced through functional SCCs may ever remain a gift to the church and the world.

We make this our prayer through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. AMEN.

Celebrating the 50 Year Anniversary of SCCs in Eastern Africa

To the founders and visionaries who created AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Key Pastoral Priority especially the Catholic bishops and other participants in the 1973, 1976 and 1979 AMECEA Plenary Meetings. Two of these bishops are Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, MAfr, the Bishop of Lilongwe Diocese in Malawi who died in 2012 and Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, the Bishop of Rulenge Diocese in Tanzania who died in 2002.

I see a resurgence of interest in SCCs worldwide. Some reasons:

1. Influence of Synodality/Synodal Process. At the Press Conference in Rome on Friday, 20 April, 2023 Sister Nathalie presented the Report of the Synodal Continental Task Force and emphasized “that the strong experience of Small Christian Communities/Base Ecclesial Communities in Asia, Africa and Oceania is an experience of synodality.”
2. New Catholic Church Organizations like Today's American Catholic and its Mikro initiative on Small Christian Communities.
3. Influence of the digital world including the internet and social media.

Today's American Catholic (TAC) is planning to publish a new edition of the book *Conversation, Risk, and Conversion: The Inner and Public Life of Small Christian Communities* (Orbis Books, 1997) as a part of its Mikro Initiative on Small Christian Communities. Hopefully there will be an Ebook version too. Hopefully our ongoing 2021 -- 2024 Synodal Process will help to reinvigorate SCCs in the USA.

Thanks to our SCCs Website and Facebook Page Moderator Bernard Mberere, we are creatively experimenting to developing new ways of using the internet and social media. For example, he has "pinned" (the word in computer language) the "Prayer for the 50 Year Anniversary of SCCs in Eastern Africa" on the Home Page of the SCCs Facebook Page. It can be found under the word "Featured" immediately under the photos.

As we approach Pentecost Sunday and the Pentecost Season let us rely more on the Holy Spirit. We recall *Revelations 2:7*: “Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches.” What is the Holy Spirit saying to:

1. Each of personally.
2. Our families, our SCCs, our parishes, our religious congregations, our missionary societies.
3. Our Local Churches.
4. The Universal Catholic Church.

Prayers.

While visiting Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA in May 2023, I met a lecturer who said she was a devoted member of a Christian Life Community (CLC) while an undergraduate. Then for some years she continued in an Alumni CLC. When I asked her why she and her friends stopped their small community she answered: "Babies."

We continue to develop a close relationship between AMECEA (an acronym for "Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa.") based in Nairobi, Kenya and LIM (Loyola Institute for Ministry) at Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA. This message is on the LIM Facebook Page: "LIM has a focus area in Small Christian Community Formation, and Small Christian Communities are a pastoral priority in the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa. Beginning this July, 2023 AMECEA (the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa) will celebrate the Golden Jubilee of this pastoral priority. Please join us in praying the "Golden Jubilee Prayer for SCCs"--for the success of the Golden Jubilee and for the ongoing vitality of this new way of being Catholic Church in Eastern Africa and around the world. This is a shareable link to the prayer."

50TH ANNIVERSARY (1973-2023) OF BUILDING THE CATHOLIC CHURCH THROUGH SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES (SCCs) IN THE AMECEA REGION

Gracious and loving God, we give you thanks for the gift of our faith. As we joyfully commemorate 50 years of fulfilling the experience of "Small Christian Communities (SCCs)" as "a new way of being church," we recall and give thanks to the founding bishops, who out of their love for Jesus, your Son and the Catholic Church, generously introduced this new pastoral model of the church.

God our Father, as AMECEA celebrates and looks to its future, we pray that the fruits of the Synod on Synodality (2021-2024) find fulfillment through reinvigorated SCCs. Enkindle in us the spirit of listening, discernment and communion for active participation as we journey together in the mission of evangelization. Gracious God, strengthen us in our faith, hope, and charity so that the seeds of Christian discipleship sown

[DOCS.GOOGLE.COM](https://docs.google.com)

Golden Jubilee Prayer for SCCs in the AMECEA Region

GOLDEN JUBILEE PRAYER FOR THE COMMEMORATION OF THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY

The North American Forum for Small Christian Communities (NAFSCC) Pentecost Faith Sharing asks these two Reflection Questions that can be discerned in all our SCCs:

1. What is your "favorite gift" that God has given you and how have you used it over many years to help others?
2. What gifts has the Holy Spirit given to the Catholic Church through the Synod on Synodality process thus far?

In January 2023, the Daughters of Charity (St. Louis Province, USA) began the Vincentian Encounter Program to encompass their young adult ministry efforts. Vincentian Encounter includes the Vincentian Small Faith Community Program, an exciting new pilot that supports young people who meet monthly to pray, learn about the Vincentian charism, and talk about how their faith connects to important current topics. Anti-racism and anti-oppression training is incorporated into the groups to help participants build desegregated, inclusive faith communities.

One of the few Small Christian Communities Offices on the diocesan level in the USA is the Office of Small Christian Communities in St. Petersburg Diocese, Florida, USA. The office:

- Promotes, develops, supports and trains Small Christian Communities and their leadership.

- Assists parishes and Catholic entities in building communities that regularly engage in connecting life and faith through reflection and relationship building in all activities.
- Contains links to many SCCs Resources.

Pope Francis says: “We need Christian communities in which space expands, where everyone can feel at home, where the structures and pastoral means favor not the creation of [inward looking] small groups, but the joy of being and feeling co-responsible.” The pope is not criticizing Small Christian Communities per se/as such. He is criticizing the exclusive, inward looking, self-reverential, self focused self help groups that are only concerned about themselves and their needs. The genuine SCCs are inclusive, outward looking, concerned about others and reaching out to others in practical pastoral and social ways.

From an active Catholic in the USA: "Yes, definitely for SCCs. In the US, that I've seen, or the middle and southern part of the US where I have lived, it seems easier for faith/spiritual groups in the Catholic Church to be spiritual and emotional support type groups and not really go on into action in the community, but they are not really liberation theology style SCCs. So glad you have kept this important and powerful tradition going and active more widely!"

Yes, our research confirms that these self help groups/support groups are the fastest growing in USA.

One type of SCC is the Root & Branch Do it Yourself (DIY) Small Group. For more information go to: <https://www.rootandbranchsynod.org/diy>

A very helpful video is “Root & Branch DIY: Why We Stay - Sharing Signs of Hope” [Synod 2021 | Root & Branch Synod \(rootandbranchsynod.org\)](https://www.rootandbranchsynod.org) 28.28 minutes

In this video, English Passionist priest Nicholas Postlethwaite, CP speaks encouragingly about starting Do It Yourself (DIY) groups and how this is the way forward for our church. Nicholas reminds us of Pope Francis' words that he felt Jesus was knocking on the church door to get out, not on the outside waiting to get in. We need to learn to combine two key essential human roles to move forward:

1. The role of undertaker (to know when something is coming to an end and how to lay it down respectfully and sensitively and gently but nonetheless not to try and prolong it beyond where it has come to).
2. The role of midwife (where is new life being born. How do we help that new life into its new birth and nurture it and sustain it.

More background info can be found on "Spirit Unbounded," a new platform for Catholic reform bringing together a global, lay-led Christian network of groups for transformational change. <https://www.rootandbranchsynod.org/spirit-unbounded>

From Paschal Mahalagu, Sukuma seminarian from the Catholic Diocese of Shinyanga, Tanzania:

During my pastoral experience as a seminarian in 2022, one of my activities was the pastoral care for growing Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the outstations in a parish in Shinyanga Diocese, Tanzania. One day I was teaching a group of 20 Christians on the role of every Christian in the Small Christian Community. An old man, the chairperson of the SCC, in commenting on what we had learned concluded with this Sukuma proverb: "ng'wanangwa

itashilaga" meaning "learning has no end." This Sukuma proverb is commonly used in various occasions mainly when receiving new knowledge about something like a new way of farming or keeping animals or any other new thing. It is used as the catalyst or a motivation for the attentiveness of the participant, so as to bring a positive result to a particular program. By using this proverb, my teaching on SCCs was well received. Before giving my talk on SCCs I used to say this Sukuma proverb as an introductory part.

For our Forum (exchange of ideas) you are invited to give an African Proverb related to Synodality/Synodal Process (“walking together” or “journeying together”). Here are some examples:

- *If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together.*
- *A friend is someone you share the path with.*
- *“Go in that direction” does not mean that you go. To go means, “let’s go together!”*
- *It takes a whole village to raise a child.*

What are your examples? People have added:

Many hands make light work.
A cooking pot always sits on three stones.
One hand washes the other hand.

Our SCC Poll says: “Eighty-Fifth Round: The best part of my Small Christian Community is...” One choice is: “Value of listening to the Gospel in our current Synodal Process.”

Here is how our current Synodal Process can affect the steps of our weekly SCC gathering that reads the Gospel of the following Sunday and applies it to our daily lives. Taken from “13 Steps in the Weekly *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection/Bible—Daily Life Connections* Service of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa:”

Step 7. Silence. Listen to what God is saying/what God wants to tell us in this Gospel passage. Open oneself to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is one reason why the Synodal Process is different and can be very creative. This period of silence is not wasted time or empty time. It is a time of deeper listening and deeper reflection.

Step 8. *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection/Bible—Daily Life Connections*. Connect, relate and apply the *Bible* (Gospel) to our daily lives and experience (on both personal and society-wide levels). This is lectionary-based faith-sharing/Gospel-based faith-sharing. SCC members share their reflections sitting together in a circle. This is the most important part of the weekly gathering of the SCC. In the traditional way each SCC member would share his or her pre-prepared reflection one by one. In the synodal way we listen to the people who share first and build on/add to what they have said. The tone is communal discernment rather than discussion.

From Alloys Nyakundi: “Thanks so very much for sharing this message with us. Yes, indeed listening is very important during this Synodal Process and during our weekly Faith Sharing groups. Listening for others to speak is a key takeaway I took from this week's Tuesday St. Isidore SCCs. It helped to get an insight that sometimes the Holy Spirit speaks to us through listening to the sharing of other people.”

On a recent Zoom Gathering Father Emmanuel Chimombo, Pastoral Coordinator at AMECEA, described activities during the Golden Jubilee Celebration of 50 Years of SCCs in Eastern Africa that will include the participation of laypeople to help evaluate the status of SCCs.

Chimombo said that SCCs can act as a counterbalance to the culture of “individualism” that has crept into the church. Feedback from laypeople is critical in “reawakening the spirituality” of SCCs to empower local leaders. SCC members are trained to identify the needs of their neighbors, not just their fellow Catholics, becoming in the process a “neighborhood church.”

AMECEA will gather data on member conferences and “document, publish, and disseminate theological and historical account[s] of SCCs as [a] Pastoral Priority in the region.” The end goals will be to reawaken and reanimate SCCs with programs for SCC facilitators, and to strengthen the network of those who have studied SCCs through LIM’s schedule of courses.

May our Small Christian Communities around the world to pray hard for the USA Bishops who are meeting in Orlando, Florida, USA in early June, 2023. May the Holy Spirit guide them to make important decisions about the October, 2023 Synod in Rome and the ongoing Synodal Process. See the online article by Michael Winters in *NCR*: "The US bishops are meeting in June. Synodality is not on the agenda."

New Article:

"Loyola Institute for Ministry and Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa Advance the Work of Synodality and Small Christian Communities" by Michael Centore. 1 June 2023. Today's American Catholic (TAC) Website



TODAYSAMERICANCATHOLIC.ORG

[Loyola Institute for Ministry and Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa Advance the Work of Synodality and Small Christian](#)

We continue to research the “After College, What? Syndrome.” A college student can have an excellent experience in prayer and faith formation in a campus ministry program, but then get lost after graduation especially in finding a User Friendly Parish for Young Adults and/or a Small Faith Community (in person, online or hybrid) in his or her new professional work placement. A graduate of Yale Law School (New Haven, Connecticut, USA) was posted to Providence, Rhode Island, USA. In searching for a new parish he said:

I'm quite excited to find my new community when I move to Providence in just a few days. I am taking any and all recommendations for new parishes to try. Ideally, I would like to be part of a community that welcomes many perspectives, backgrounds, identities and hard conversations. I would especially like to meet other young Catholics. That said, I have been spoiled by our amazing Small Faith Sharing Community that is part of St. Thomas More (STM) Chapel and Center at Yale. I feel like I am strong enough in my faith to pay it forward. In other words, with the right people around me, I would love to build other vibrant Catholic communities in and around Providence.

How we wish that other Catholic college graduates would have the same desire and commitment to prioritize their faith life. May this be our constant prayer.

Response: "This graduate certainly has his priorities right. Besides the job, he finds it important to find a faith community as well so that his faith life is supported. It is also very uplifting that he appreciates the growth in faith that his former Small Faith Community enabled in him and that he feels developed enough to want to enable others. That is practical Christianity, a gift of Pentecost. He wants to, chooses to, spearhead other SCCs voluntarily. This is noble. May he meet with equal willingness from those he will invite on this journey.

We pray for and with the African Maryknoll seminarians who are taking their Permanent, Renewal and Temporary Oaths today at the Maryknoll New York, USA. Some were members of SCCs at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya.

From a Kenyan Maryknoll missionary priest serving in Guatemala: "With time, by God's grace, I'll figure out how to continue/strengthen/rejuvenate the *Comunidades Ecclesiales de Base*."

All three of these verbs are important. Remember that in Eastern Africa we say in Swahili:

"*Kuunda*" (to start or set up SCCs).

"*Kuimarisha*" (to make the SCCs strong).

"*Kudumisha*" (to make the SCC permanent and ongoing)

I am hopeful that the worldwide 2021 – 2024 Synodal Process will give new life to our SCCs/CEBs. At the Press Conference in Rome on Friday, 20 April, 2023 Sister Nathalie presented the "Report of the Synodal Continental Task Force" and emphasized "that the strong experience of Small Christian Communities/Base Ecclesial Communities in Asia, Africa and Oceania is an experience of synodality." **NOTE:** She had not visited Latin American gatherings at that time.

As the Synodal Process continues SCC leaders are involved in discerning the challenges of "Welcome and Hospitality:" Some comments:

1. In addition to the ministry of "Usher," John XXIII Church/Parish in Fort Myers, Florida, USA has a designated ministry of "Greeter" (parishioners who are volunteers with official nametags who stand at the door of the church to welcome people). A creative idea.
2. From Bugoma, Kenya: "Interesting idea. I am suggesting this right away to my Subparish Church in the village to have Greeters at the church entrance and to involve young people of both genders in the Subparish Council leadership team."

3. From Nativity Parish in Baltimore, Maryland, USA: "Everyone has a name tag on for security purposes. Each name tag identifies the name of the person and their ministry. As an example, a name tag would say, " Karen Sheehan - Greeter". We also felt that "Host" was a little more welcoming and modern than "Usher" but they essentially mean the same thing as far as your reference goes. Greeters are typically outside opening doors to the church for guests and Hosts are in the Sanctuary."

4. From Newark Archdiocese, New Jersey, USA: "YES - we are pushing for a Greeters Ministry and training Greeters not Ushers."

5. A friend told me that years ago he and his wife were traveling in California. They stopped at a Catholic Church on Sunday. A young 10 year old girl met them at the door of the church and said: "Welcome. I am the Greeter."

It is interesting that 30 years ago the Vatican discouraged the use of the word minister/ministry for lay people. It was associated with the clerical state. The preferred name for lay people was services. Now ministry/ministries is used everywhere for everyone. We have developed new lay ecclesial ministries in our SCCs in Eastern Africa. One example is Healing Minister who prays over the sick. Go to: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org>

During our US Regional Assembly at Maryknoll, New York, USA today we will have a Session on "Synodality/Synodal Process." Rather than the usual Small Discussion Groups we will have Small Communal Discernment Groups: Small Breakout Groups that follow the Steps of the Synodal Process. Prayers please. In promoting Synodality/Synodal Process let us see the positive side (how the glass is half full) rather than the negative side (how the glass is half empty).

Some follow-up:

1. Some participants said they used the steps of the Synodal Process for the first time. Key were the periods of silence and the deeper listening to the views of others. We need to learn the difference between the usual Small Discussion Groups and the Synod-inspired Small Communal Discernment Groups.

2. We hope that the newer Orbis Books help Maryknollers get into both the themes and the process of our Synodal Journey.

We can learn from the SCC models that are part of Protestant campus ministry programs. The Overflow Services are a key part of the Methodist Wesley experience at the University of Texas in Austin, Texas, USA. They offer a wide range of small discussion groups, including the popular "God's Office Hours," where students debate topics including abortion, LGBTQ. rights and religion's relationship to politics. Austin is an accepting place for a lot of different communities. College students crave connection. One student said: "It's just about being a community who supports others and loves others."

"AMECEA: Prepares to Launch Golden Jubilee For Small Christian Communities Ecclesial Model in Region"



COMMUNICATIONS.AMECEA.ORG

AMECEA: Prepares to Launch Golden Jubilee For Small Christian Communities Ecclesial Model in Region

Today on the Feast of the Body and Blood of Christ (Holy Eucharist) our Healey Hagerty Extended Family Zoom Mass took place in New Vernon, New Jersey, USA. During our Shared Homily Charlotte Hagerty quoted the example of the college student at Michigan State University, Michigan, USA: "I was a devout Catholic who went to a Catholic High School on the East Coast. Every Sunday I went to mass with my parents. In my first year at Michigan State I dutifully participated in Sunday Mass on the campus. Then I began to "drift" and didn't find mass that interesting. I joined an Evangelical Church on campus that had lively singing, a band and entertaining sermons. But after a few months I felt something was missing. I had an unfulfilled yearning, desire, hunger for something more. Finally, I discovered that I really missed the Eucharist at the Catholic Mass. So I returned to the Catholic Church on campus and now feel very nourished by receiving Jesus Christ every Sunday in the sacrament of the Eucharist."

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to help develop this yearning, desire and hunger for something more in Catholic Young People today.

"Good Case Study of Synodality/the Synodal Process:"

The Jesuits report that when Christian Life Community (CLC) Young Adults gather throughout the world, they reflect on their joys and challenges in Small Local Communities (SLCs). Through two or three rounds of authentic sharing and deep listening the young CLCers share how they are traveling, reflect on their prayer and notice God's action in their daily experience. The community experience of God's goodness equips the young people to face life's tough times with hope.

CLC is a caring space to celebrate life. It is a familiar space free from judgment and discrimination, where God's presence may be named. It is a home for welcoming and including everyone, walking together as friends and sharing life with one another.

We are trying to develop our Sukuma Legacy Project in a synodal way, to be a Synodal Church. I am reminded of the African Proverb in the Poll on our African Proverbs Website: *One hand does not raise a child*. Sukuma (Tanzania) Proverb. Father Zakaria Kashinje, OSA, an Augustinian priest originally from Ndoleleji Parish, Shinyanga Diocese, Tanzania is coordinating the project. He is trying to learn Word Press with the help of Father Dave Smith, MM. He is also trying to set up World Remit for online fund raising.

Go to:

Traditional Legacy Research Society

<https://sukumalegacy.org>

The Traditional Legacy Research Society promotes the history, culture, oral literature — Proverbs, Sayings, Riddles, Stories, Myths and Songs — and visual representations of the Sukuma People in Tanzania in East Africa. There are various examples of SCCs and community values. Includes a Blog (comments on the Sukuma Legacy Project).

Small Christian Community Members remain committed to the Synodal Process. It is important that the African delegates to the Synod in Rome in October, 2023 explain the SCC Model of Church in Eastern Africa. Concerning the selection of delegates Cardinal Robert McElroy of San Diego Diocese, USA says: “I too am hopeful that the lay members of the synod will include those outside the mainstream so as to bring all perspectives to the synodal discernment. And I will certainly try to advance that in conversations that I have on the selection of delegates.”

Kenyans’ Preparations for World Youth Day in Portugal in “top gear”: National Chaplain

[Kenyans’ Preparations for World Youth Day in Portugal in “top gear”: National Chaplain \(aciafrica.org\)](https://www.aciafrica.org/.../new-co-published-book-on-...)

The 41 member delegation (25 female and 16 male) from Kenya that will participate in the August 1-6, 2023 event comprises 29 youth, two bishops, eight priests, and two women religious. Four of the youth (two young women who are studying at Kenyatta University) and two young men who graduated from Kenyatta University) are from our Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community. We congratulate Mwanajumuiya Alloys Nyakundi for being chosen to be the coordinator of the 29 youth and to carry the Kenyan Flag in the WYD Procession in Lisbon, Portugal.

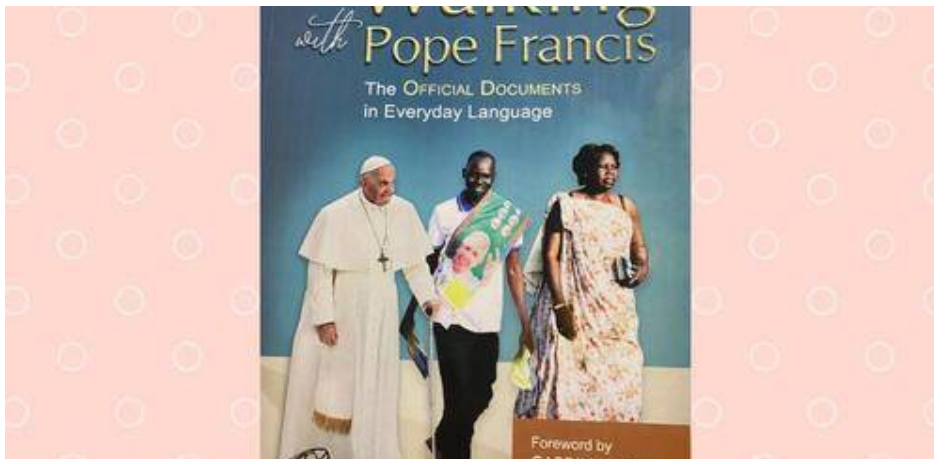
For many years we have encouraged Small Christian Communities (SCCs) of young people. Kenyatta University has excellent SCCs as documented on our SCCs Website and Facebook Page.

Low cost books related to Pope Francis are important resources for SCC members. See the ACI Africa (Association for Catholic Information in Africa) Online News Service (a service of EWTN News) article on the Paulines Publications Africa Edition of *Walking with Pope Francis - The Official Documents in Everyday Language*. \$10. Nairobi, Kenya.

"New Co-published Book on Pope Francis “suitable for all categories of people”:
Pauline Nun"

[https://www.aciafrica.org/.../new-co-published-book-on...](https://www.aciafrica.org/.../new-co-published-book-on-...)

I like the “walking together” cover. There are many good links to the pope's writings.



ACIAFRICA.ORG

New Co-published Book on Pope Francis “suitable for all categories of people”: Pauline Nun

As SCC members worldwide participate in Synodality/the Synodal Process, we are often asking what is a specific Catholic Church action/decision related to Synodality/the Synodal Process. Here is a good example from the US Catholic Bishops’ meeting in Orlando, Florida, USA.

Bishop Michael Olsen of Fort Worth, Texas, USA, a member of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Doctrine, described revising the “Health Care Directives on Transgender Patients” as a "synodal" process that will require significant listening to show pastoral sensitivity and compassion to people while staying true to Catholic moral doctrine.

The *Instrumentum Laboris* (IL or Working Document) of the Synod in Rome in October, 2023 will be available on Tuesday, 20 June, 2023.

Some key points:

1. While the IL is primarily a document for the participants of the October, 2023 assembly, it is also a valuable tool for individual groups at the diocesan and national levels to continue their journey of reflection and discernment on how we walk together as a Catholic Church; and to carry out ecclesial initiatives. NOTE: This applies to Small Christian Communities as well.

2. At the Press Conference in Rome to present the IL there will be brief testimonies on the preparation of members for the October Assembly and the possible use of the "Instrumentum Laboris" by local groups including by Father Rafael Simbine Junior, Secretary General of SECAM (remotely).

The USA Bishops’ new 10-year "2023-2033 National Pastoral Plan for Hispanic Ministry" contains 10 pastoral priorities: evangelization and mission, faith formation and catechesis, pastoral accompaniment of Hispanic/Latino families, youth and young adult ministries, immigration and advocacy, formation for ministry in a culturally diverse church, pastoral care for those in the periphery, liturgy and spirituality, promotion of vocations, and Catholic education.

Categories:

Specific People:

Families
 Youth
 Young Adults
 Those in the periphery

Specific Ministries:

Families
 Youth
 Young Adults
 Those in the periphery
 Specific Ministries:
 Advocacy
 Catechesis
 Catholic education
 Evangelization
 Faith formation
 Formation for ministry
 Immigration
 Liturgy
 Mission
 Spirituality
 Vocations

Compare this plan to the Eastern Africa (AMECEA) Pastoral Plan that has these differences in its priorities:

1. Formation of all agents of evangelization on all levels is the first priority.
2. Emphasis on Small Christian Communities is a key pastoral priority. NOTE: In relation to Synodality/the Synodal Process the SCC Model of Church with its weekly lectionary-based faith sharing is the preferred methodology, not just one option among many.
3. Committed to Holistic Evangelization and Integral Development.
4. Deeper evangelization, constant conversion and prayer, inculturation, ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue.
5. Empowering the laity and the religious men and women to play their active role in the Catholic Church and society.
6. Preferential option for the poor, oppressed and marginalized.
7. Networking, effective communication, and advocacy.
8. Poverty eradication, sustainable development.

May our SCC members read, reflect on and put into practice the

**XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS
 FOR A SYNODAL CHURCH: COMMUNION, PARTICIPATION, MISSION**

INSTRUMENTUM LABORIS For the First Session (October 2023)

SYNOD.VA
www.synod.va

Small Christian Communities are not specifically mentioned in the *Working Document*, but are referred to in other terms/wording: new communities, lay-led groups, lay associations, lay movements and ecclesial movements. This brought the following comments:

- A participant in a Zoom Gathering said: “There is no mention of Small Church Communities in the Working Document. I was surprised it wasn't included because it was in submissions from the different continents.”
- A participant in a Zoom Gathering said: "Members of Small Intentional Communities (SICs) in the Local Churches around the world are missionary disciples carrying out their evangelizing role."
- Email message to Rafael Luciandi: “Allow me to respectfully ask one more question that people have given to me: Why are the terms/names SCCs and CEBs/Base Communities absent in the Working Document?”

Some background:

At a Press Conference in Rome on Friday, 20 April, 2023 Sister Nathalie presented the “Report of the Synodal Continental Task Force” and emphasized “that the strong experience of Small Christian Communities/Base Ecclesial Communities in Asia, Africa and Oceania is an experience of synodality.”

In our webinar with the Catholic Young Adult Seekers based in Kenya you emphasized the important of CEBs (*Comunidades Eclesiales de Base*) in Latin America. Even in the “Question and Answers” period in today’s webinar you referred to the importance of Base Communities.

Here is what we wrote on our SCCs Facebook Page:

“Small Christian Communities are not specifically mentioned in the *Working Document*, but are referred to in other terms/wording: new communities, lay-led groups, lay associations, lay movements and ecclesial movements.”

Are lay-led groups the equivalent of base communities? Please advise. Thanks.”

Thanks for sharing. Also, the use of "we" language instead of "I" language brings out the true spirit of journeying/walking together in the Small Christian Communities.

There is a disconnect here. In several meetings with Pope Francis young people from around the world have urged the pope not to use “churchy” language in his speeches and documents including not using Latin. This “insider language” turns young people off. Yet this 2023 Synod Document uses *Instrumentum Laboris* (the literal translation is “instrument of work”) rather than *Working Document*. The irony is that the document itself emphasizes the “Preferential Option for Young People” and No. B 1.5 e) states: “in the relationship between the Christian community and young people, many of whom feel excluded by the language adapted in [Catholic] Church contexts, which can seem incomprehensible to them.”

Latin is complicated. Here is an example that can confuse young people:

Alumnus: singular for male graduate

Alumni: plural for male graduates

Alumna: singular for female graduate⁵³²

Alumnae: plural for female graduates

Congratulations Alloys M. Nyakundi, MPS a Kenyan young person and alumnus of Kenyatta University, Kenya for being selected as the Kenyan flag bearer for the Kenyan delegation that will be attending the World Youth Day celebration in Lisbon, Portugal (July 26 - August 7). He is in charge of the Small Christian Communities for young people and a facilitator of Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community that creates a safe space for young people from different parts of the world to share their life challenges and support one another. Alloys will be joining other young people from different parts of the world to do rehearsals in preparation for welcoming the Pope while in Lisbon. Gratitude to the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops for bestowing faith to Alloys Nyakundi.

May Mwanajumuiya Alloys proudly carry the Kenyan flag.

An example of the change in wording in Catholic Church documents is “Local Church” gradually replacing “Particular Church.” Footnote 3 of the *Instrumentum Laboris* states: “The expression ‘Local Church’ here indicates what the “Code of Canon Law” calls the ‘Particular Church’”. The term Particular Church was enshrined in the documents of Vatican II and the new Code of Canon Law. But it has undergone new meanings in new contexts as explained by theologian Father Laurenti Magesa:

Perhaps the most important inspiration of Vatican II as far as Africa is concerned has been the need to construct an African Local Church or African Local Churches. The council used the term “Particular Churches” because many in the council, following curial conviction, argued that in the diocese structure we already have Local Churches. But this is not how the idea has been understood and developed in Africa since then. The need for a Local Church is seen in a new, different light.

The term “Particular Church” is seen in Africa to be a juridical-structural [administrative] term; it identifies the church with the diocese. The notion of “Local Church,” however, is favored in Africa because it is perceived as going beyond that geographical and juridical circumspection by taking into account theological-pastoral implications. It emphasizes the necessity of culture and inculturation in catechesis, preaching and the celebration of the liturgy. It accepts the reality of the faith at any level: continental, regional, diocesan, parochial, Small Christian Community, and even family levels as contextual.

Bishop Colin Davies says that “Particular Church” is part of the vocabulary of the structures of the Eastern Orthodox Churches and does not fit the African context.

A Ghana woman theologian added: “I love this! Wisdom from the Local Church that is essential for a Synodal Church!” Another comment: “Africa, both the People of God and

⁵³² How mistakes multiply on the internet. In an article in the *ACIAfrica Online News Service* Alloys Nyakundi was mistakenly identified as a Kenyatta University Alumna (female). This was repeated by the *AMECEA Online News Service* and other social media. Careful proofreading is essential, not just blindly copying from an existing online source.

Gospel of St. *Matthew* 20 1-16a (“The Workers in the Vineyard”) one SCC member living in Morristown, New Jersey, USA said: “When I drove by the train station this morning, Hispanic workers were standing around waiting to be hired as day laborers/casual workers. When I returned around noon some were still standing there.” We were struck by the relevancy of the Gospel for today’s world.

Jesus uses this metaphor of hiring workers in the vineyard to explain God’s plan of salvation. The Jewish people, the Chosen Nation, received the invitation to the Kingdom of Heaven first. The Gentiles were invited later. But all are equal in the Kingdom. Pope Francis calls us to go the poor on the margins and peripheries of society and invite them. There is no favoritism, no discrimination. The present 2021 – 2024 Synodal Process encourages us to “enlarge the space of our tent” so everyone can fit into the Catholic Church including the homeless, LGBTQ people, persons with special needs and others. All are invited.

Comment from Alloys Nyakundi: "I just wanted to comment about the gospel and preaching so that preaching is more provocative, that is, people can relate the homily to their life experiences. For me, I think most of the priests or bishops are not in touch with the real experiences of people. When they're preparing their homilies, they prepare the homilies based on their own experiences, what they feel about life and what they feel is right for the people. But for example, when we are talking about Small Christian Communities, and this is where we have people gathering themselves in their houses somewhere and reading the Gospel and sharing their experiences. So if we had priests and bishops meeting people at this level, and listening to the people, they would use those experiences from the people in preparing their homilies. And so on Sunday, when they give their homilies they will be giving their homilies based on what they listened to in the experiences that people have shared in their SCC gatherings."

Clyde has done a big service for us after our CCRI Zoom Presentation. He says: “Here is a transcript generated by otter.ai., along with the audio file. I don’t have time to complete editing the raw transcript, so we’ll see how useful it is.”

Producing a written transcript generated by otter.ai came out fine. Here is a section that I have edited and posted on our SCCs Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/www.smallchristiancommunities.org>):

Joe Healey 56:15

Thank you, Paul, for your many insights, especially the historical trajectory. I'd like to build on what you said in referring to Paul VI in 1971 and then Karl Rahner. We have on this call five or six people from Africa. The African theologians say that the documents coming from Rome continue to be European--centered, or Eurocentric, you might call it. I want to give a specific example. We're very interested in what are called Small Christian Communities. They go by many names. These came out of the liberation theology that you refer to with Gutierrez -- the CEBs of Latin America. In all the documents of Vatican Two, and all of Canon Law, there's not one word about small community or subparish or outstation, nothing below the parish level. The African theologians are saying that we should look at the grassroots that you refer to, that we have to expand our documents. Canon Law should include these Local Church pastoral structures. Do you think our experiences in the Global Church are going to enter into new documents that come out of Rome? Thank you.

Paul Lakeland 57:54

Well, before I tried to offer my wise words on this, do any of our African brothers and sisters want to comment on that? Anyone want to add some things to support Joe's remark?

Irish priest who served in West Africa 58:13

Well, thank you for your insights. Paul, I am a Spiritan missionary priest. I lived for over 34 years in West Africa. I was ordained before Vatican Two. But when it came, we really, really took it to heart. And we tried to put it into practice. And since then we believe that the model of the church that is the most commonly used in the last 100 years is that of an organization or institution with stress on those structural elements, especially the hierarchy. We believe that this model does not express the theology of the Church of Vatican Two. And we believe that the idea of the People of God is best brought into reality by Small Christian Communities. This was our pastoral direction all the time I lived in West Africa. And I still try to practice it here. I'm living on a small island off the coast of Ireland.

Paul Lakeland 59:30

Yes. You know I'm not telling any of you anything new when I say that, of course, the work of the vision of Pope Francis is drawn from the Latin American experience. And Pope Francis I think is just as keen as you are in changing the church in a way in which Small Intentional Communities have the kind of role that they should have. I think he would agree with every word you've said. I think that you can see a sign of it. Francis has a horrible job -- trying to transform this ossified structure into something more, more alive in the Spirit. But it's bureaucratic in a way. But this is his job. One of the signs is the restructuring of the Roman Curia. And I don't want to go into the details, but there are two important things. One is he said, "Well, lay people cannot exercise governing roles in the Curia." That's very interesting. But the most important thing, he downgraded the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, and what does he put at the top, the Dicastery for Evangelization. So he's talking about the most important thing in the church is proclaiming the gospel. And that's done in local communities. It's not done by some bishop or power or theologian writing a book, it's done by people to people. So I do think that he wants this to happen. Whether this will happen or not seems to me to depend primarily on whether this adventure of Synodality actually works. And my guess is, it's going to work. And I'm talking about something I know nothing about now. So forgive me, my guess it is going to work much more likely in Africa and Asia and Latin America than it is in Europe and North America. And, of course, you know, the church in Europe and North America is in fairly desperate straits, I would say.

Today 29 June on this great Feast of St. Peter and Paul let us be energized by the witness of these two apostles to proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ.

Serge Gabriel Sindani, who is from the Archdiocese of Kinshasa, DRC said the duty of the popularization of the 3rd National Eucharistic Congress is to each participant. "At my own level, I'm already passing on the exhortations that I've received to my family and to my Base Community. I hope that parishes and other Base Communities will do the same."

July 2023 to September 2023 Poll: My favorite proverb of the month on "Togetherness" – Part II is...

<https://afriprov.tangaza.ac.ke/>

The six choices represent six African Proverbs that highlight the priorities and concerns of the 2021 –2024 Synod/Synodal Process that means the People of God in the Catholic Church walking together and journeying together.

The *AMECEA Online Newsletter* states: “Among the many countries that will be represented during the World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, we are blessed as a country to hoist the Kenyan flag,” the National Youth Chaplain for the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) Father Cosmas Mwova shared in an interview with *AMECEA Online* adding that it is a recognition for the country. According to the youth chaplain, Mr. Alloys Mogere Nyakundi will be the Kenyan flag bearer for the Kenyan delegation.

Mr. Nyakundi, an alumnus of Kenyatta University in Kenya is in charge of the Small Christian Communities (SCC’s) for young people and a facilitator of Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community that creates a safe space for young people from different parts of the world to share their life challenges and support one another.”

Language is tricky. "In charge of" is not the correct wording. In the SCC Model of Church no one person is in charge. That is the traditional top-down model of leadership, governance and authority. Better to use "coordinator" or "facilitator" or "animator."

This is an opportunity to share the SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa with the young people of Europe and other parts of the world.

Alloys Mogere Nyakundi: “I’m so grateful and honored for this great opportunity to represent my country, Kenya in Lisbon, Portugal.”

Celebration of the Golden Jubilee (1973 -- 2023) of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa

Sunday, 20 August, 2023: Launch of the 50th Anniversary (1973 -- 2023 of SCCs, Dedza Diocese, Malawi.

Monday, 21 August, 2023 to Wednesday 23 August, 2023: SCCs Workshop, Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi

ANNOUNCEMENT: It is important that we continue to evaluate our SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa so we can make it better. Please vote in the current polls.

Eighty-sixth Round (July, 2023 – August, 2023): The best part of my Small Christian Community is:

1. Lens through which we see the world.
2. Where the Holy Spirit works.
3. Backbone of the Catholic Church in Africa.
4. Reinvigorated SCCs as a fruit of Synodality.
5. Weekly lectionary-based faith sharing leading to practical action.
6. Most complete Synodal Process in the parish.

Vote at:



SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

Small Christian Communities – Small Christian Communities

Small Christian Communities

These six choices were proposed by our SCC members themselves. Each choice represents an important aspect of the SCCs Pastoral Model of Church – both the dynamics and the activities.

Celebration of the Golden Jubilee (1973 -- 2023) of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa

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Comments in the Forum:

- Dedza Diocese has been chosen as the venue of the launch for historical reasons. Mua Parish in this diocese is a very Catholic Parish where Bishop Patrick Kalilombe was born.
- Diane Friederich Kledzik: Congratulations on living out this pastoral priority! Grateful for the opportunity I had 5 years ago to visit Malawi with Catholic Relief Services.
- Thanks, Diane. Lilongwe Archdiocese in Malawi was the first diocese in Eastern Africa to start the AMECEA Pastoral Priority in 1973!
- Oya, love from Nigeria, congratulations.

Good question for our Thursday, 6 July 2023 Online Young Adult Seekers SCC gathering:

Look around and create images that you find reflect the synodal way of church/SCC way of church. Every person will get an opportunity to share her/his image/s. You can draw or get an image from your ministry place of work, friends or Local Church. The key here is to get images that can help us reflect deeply on how we can live Synodality/the Synodal Way and the Small Christian Community Way.

Some answers: see below:

How many Catholic Church *Parish Bulletins* (printed or online) have the lectionary-based scripture readings for daily mass in the following week and invite parishioners by saying: "We invite you to prayerfully reflect on the Readings for the week of ..." The best online parish bulletins have hyperlinks to the daily lectionary-based Scripture Readings. Again we ask: How many people read the Gospel of the following Sunday ahead of time -- before entering the church on Sunday? How many read it in a community?

The New Language of Synodality/the Synodal Process (evolving)

<u>New</u>	<u>Old</u>
Accompanying	Leading
Bottom up	Top down
Deeper listening to others	Giving one's views/position
Dialogue	Exchange of opinions
Discern	Judge
Discernment	Discussion
Gathering	Meeting
Global South	Developing Countries
Horizontal	Vertical
Inclusive	Exclusive
LGBTQ+	objectively disordered
Local Church	Particular Church
People of God	Clerical
Spiritual conversation	Discussion
Walking together Journeying together	Hierarchical

Additions and comments are welcome.

An active Kenyan Catholic lay woman in the Catholic Church shared this: "This Sunday I participated in the training of all leaders that were elected in our parish recently. All the facilitators who were Catholic priests never mentioned the Synod or Catholic social teaching. One taught us on what the *Bible* says about leadership. This sounded like a Protestant teaching. No mention of Catholicism and her teaching on the subject. Is there a Protestantization or Pentecostalization of the Catholic Church or a sabotage of Pope Francis among African Catholic Clergy?"

In the "Synodal Process" there should be lay people (women and men) involved in the teaching and training of new leaders in the parish.

Research indicates that in both Eastern Africa and the USA Catholic priests, especially younger priests, are behind in emphasizing Synodality and using the "Synodal Process."

Our Thursday, 6 July 2023 Online Young Adult Seekers SCC gathering consisted of 18 people from Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, Tanzania and USA. Our topic was:

"Look around or create visual images that you find reflecting the synodal way of church/SCC way of church. Every person will get an opportunity to share her/his image/s. You can draw or get an image from your ministry place of work, friends or the Local Church. The key here is to get visual images that can help us reflect deeply on how we can live Synodality/the Synodal Way and the Small Christian Community Way."

Participants shared the following 14 visual images:

- Official logo of the Synod 2021- 2024: drawing of a line of a wide variety of people walking in one direction
- Photo of a wide variety of people walking together hand in hand (meaning of Synod).
- Photo of Brown, Black, Red, White and Yellow hands intertwined/holding each others' wrists
- Drawing of a Chain of Discipleship: six young people standing and holding hands in front of a church
- Photo of a Small Christian Community (SCC) Gathering that meets every Saturday in the parish: 15 people sitting in a circle
- Photo of a Small Christian Community (SCC) gathering in Kenyatta University, Kenya with students from different ethnic backgrounds and from different parts of the country
- Photo of a Workshop on Synodality on where everyone is sitting together in a circle
- Photo of different people together in a gathering of the Parish Choir
- Photo of young people sitting in a circle praying the rosary
- Photo of children planting a tree seedling
- Picture of the Holy Family: Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus
- Photo of the Salesian family in the Catholic Church: priests, brothers and lay people together
- Photo of a parish where everyone is connected and communicating
- Photo of a mother goat, her two babies and a little dog together

Isenja, Silas, “Malawi Bishops Call For ‘Reflective Moments’ Ahead of Small Christian Communities Jubilee,” *ACI Africa Online Newsletter*, 7 July, 2023, ACI Africa Website, retrieved on 7 July, 2023, [Malawi Bishops Call for “reflective moments” ahead of Small Christian Communities Jubilee \(aciafrica.org\)](https://www.aciafrica.org/malawi-bishops-call-for-reflective-moments-ahead-of-small-christian-communities-jubilee)

The event to be launched on Sunday, 20 August, 2023 in all the Catholic Dioceses of Malawi and conclude in July, 2024. The SCCs Golden Jubilee celebrations, the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM) Secretary General says, aim to highlight four fundamental characteristics of this model of being church, which include *Bible*-centeredness, the communion of the people, having outreach to the people, and promoting the principle of subsidiarity. Includes an excellent photo of a meeting of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) region. Credit: Meru Diocese.



People ask: What does a SCCs Workshop look like? This photo describes it best. Participants gather in SCCs.

Most people don't think of the fundamental characteristic of "promoting the principle of subsidiarity." The SCCs Model of Church is the church from below, from the grassroots. Decision making is on the local level.

My favorite parish in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA is St. Joan of Arc. Years ago there was a SCCs Convocation in Minneapolis/St. Paul (at St. Thomas University). Our African delegation did not want to stay at a hotel or at the university but with a SCC-related family. We stayed with a family in Edina, Minnesota. A young couple with little children. Lots of fun. The husband was on the active Parish Pastoral Council of St. Joan of Arc representing “young couples with children.” Ahead of its time. We went to a picnic of their Intergenerational SCC when the grandparents came too.

Julia Oseka is a young adult delegate to the Synod in Rome in October, 2023. Julia is originally from Poland and now is a student (Class of 2025) at Saint Joseph’s University (SJU) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. Here are some of her views and suggestions:

1. "Synodality should have the spirit of coffee meet-ups. "We should meet not only with our peers, but also with our professors and the people who are leading the Catholic Church — with our parish priests, with our ministers, with our bishops and with our religious sisters."

2. Philadelphia Archbishop Nelson Perez took her up on the offer. They shared coffee together the following month and discussed the importance of the participation of women and young people in the Church, as well as the presence of underserved communities. Oseka's conversation with Perez led to her being selected as the delegate for the North American continental stage in February, 2023. She was the only college student from Philadelphia's Synodality in Catholic Higher Education group to represent the Philadelphia Archdiocese at the event. The experience was "absolutely breathtaking," Oseka says. "And I'm extremely grateful and honestly very happy that Archbishop Perez wanted young people to be involved in the continental stage." Oseka hopes that her participation on the continental stage will help create a more inclusive church for everyone like the community she has found at SJU. "What are my hopes?," Oseka asks, "That our smaller communities will continue to gather — not only gather and talk about the Catholic Church but also in different fields. The conversations on campus show that young people want to be involved, that people care about their spirituality."

Julia Oseka '25

For more info:
On Stage at the Global Synod



SJU.EDU
On Stage at the Global Synod

Congratulations to Cardinal-elect Protase Rugambwa, the Coadjutor Archbishop of Tabora, Tanzania on his nomination as cardinal. How many people know that he did his doctorate dissertation in Rome on SCCs? Here is the bibliographical reference:

Protase Rugambwa, "Ministry and Collaboration in Small Christian Communities: Communities in Rulenge Diocese, Tanzania, a Case Study," Rome: Lateran University, 1998.

As a graduate student in Rome I remember him visiting Rulenge Diocese in Tanzania to do research. Here is a good quote from him. "We need to always think of SCCs as relevant pastoral structures that foster the work of evangelization."

Announcement: As we continue to strengthen the SCCs in the AMECEA region, the *SCCs Training Handbook* has been reproduced in Malawi in two local languages, that is Tumbuka and Chichewa (as per the cover picture below of the two books respectively)

AMECEA

Association of Member Episcopal Conference in Eastern Africa

Walembi

Emmanuel Chimombo, Joseph G. Healey, Rita Ishengoma,
Fabian P. Mulenga, Rose Musimba, Alphonse C. L. Omolo

KUKHOZGA KAKULIRO KA MAUZENGEZGANI MU AFRICA



Buku La Kunjirikizgira
Wasambizgi

AMECEA

Association of Member Episcopal Conference in Eastern Africa

Akonzi a Bukuli

Emmanuel Chimombo, Joseph G. Healey, Rita Ishengoma,
Fabian P. Mulenga, Rose Musimba, Alphonse C. L. Omolo

Kulimbikitsa Miphakati/ Malimana mu Africa



Buku Lophunzitsira
ndi Kusulira

It is great that the different countries of AMECEA are producing their own translations of the handbook. This shows the SCCs Model of Church on the grassroots level.

Kate McElwee of the Women's Ordination Conference: "In fact, the [working] document suggests considering what 'new ministries' could be created for women specifically. Just as it isn't difficult to envisage women as deacons, there is an abundance of evidence of women around the world embodying 'new ministries' that meet the needs of the people of God. I think of women-church and Base Community models that are not constrained by what is, and is not, supposedly permissible in the eyes of Rome."

The reform group FutureChurch sponsored a Zoom Webinar on the topic "Participation, Governance, and Authority," the third in the SynodWatch series covering the "Working Document" of the XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. 1 hour and 8:36 minutes. The 10:22 minute talk on "Synodality in the African Context" by Joseph G. Healey (in collaboration with African leaders) can be found on YouTube from the 30:58 minute mark to the 41:20 minute mark.



[YOUTUBE.COM](https://www.youtube.com)

[SynodWatch Session 3: Participation, Governance, and Authority](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

A total of 245 people watched the webinar live and many more are seeing it later on YouTube.

From our webinar it is clear that the SCC Model of Church in Eastern Africa is not known in USA. It is different from the SCCs in America that go by many names. So I added the following in my talk: "The Small Christian Community or base community is an official ecclesial, pastoral structure in many countries in Africa. In the nine countries of Eastern Africa there are 195,000 SCCs, yes, 195,000! A SCC is a small neighborhood, parish-based group in an urban or rural area that is a pastoral model of church that transforms the parish into a communion of communities and an instrument of evangelization. Ideally it has weekly lectionary based faith-sharing when SCC members reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday and connects it to our daily lives and regular practical action and social outreach.

Ideally the parish is a communion or network of SCCs. The Sunday Eucharist, the high point of the liturgical week, is the union/communion/gathering of all the SCCs.

To follow up our Zoom conversation on FutureChurch last night I have made some notes as follows:

One of the most interesting questions in the Q & A period was about Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the American context. In various parts of the USA some Catholic parishes are closing, some Catholic parishes are clustering/amalgamating and new Catholic megaparishes are being built. Can SCCs be part of these megaparishes? I answered that we need to be creative in the Catholic Church and we can learn from the megachurches in the growing Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches in the USA. To expand I could have described our SCCs research on what I call the Rick Warren Model of Church based on his Saddleback Church in California as follows:

This represents a new trend and pattern worldwide: the combination of a megachurch and a network of small groups. The big Sunday liturgies of thousands of people have an “entertainment,” charismatic style and the small groups in the middle of the week focus on faith-sharing, *Bible* Reflection and an interpersonal approach. What began as part of the evangelical movement (Rick Warren and others) is now a trend in the Catholic Church in the USA especially in the South and Southwest. Can these small groups especially among Hispanic Catholics be the new face of SCCs?

We do not agree with Rick Warren’s top down style. His Saddleback Church is an Evangelical Baptist multi-site megachurch, based in Lake Forest, California. It is the largest church in California, and one of the largest in the United States of America. The church has several campuses in California and around the world. After his sermon on a particular theme or topic on Sunday that is broadcast simultaneously in the various campus/satellite churches of Saddleback Church in California, 1000s of small groups meet (in person or online) in the middle of the week to view a video based on the previous Sunday’s sermon. Then small group discussion follows. The initiative comes from Rick Warren and his team who produce the videos and choose the themes and topics.

Our Catholic SCCs Model is from the grassroots up. Ideally our SCCs are weekly lectionary based faith-sharing small communities that reflect on the Gospel of the Sunday and connect it to our daily lives and promote regular practical action and social outreach. The parish is a communion or network of SCCs.

Joseph Healey, "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 revised and updated from the 2012 print version, is available as a free, online Ebook containing 1,435 pages as of 3 August, 2023 on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website:

https://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf

page 572.

Comments are welcome.

By the way the term “Small Christian Community” is not well known in the USA. More common are the terms Small Prayer Group, Small Faith Sharing Group and Small Bible Group. Small Self-help Group, Small Self-Interest Group and Small Support Group are a different model. Ideally the parish is a communion or network of SCCs.

SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

<https://smallchristiancommunities.org>

From a participant: "I loved your phrase ‘communion ecclesiology’ --it will be a guiding theme for me during my retreat. And the audience member's comments about the Salvadoran nuns ‘dancing the spirit out of the earth were quite moving. I look forward to sharing further reflections on the megachurch -- SCC relationship you outline. What attracts me to SCCs is their inherent humility--how to preserve this if/when SCCs amalgamate into larger parish structures is the key question.

Since the "Working Document" says there is likely to be a need after the 2023 synod session for theological reflections and for discussions about changes in *Canon Law*, I asked Cardinal Jean-Claude Hollerich, SJ, the Relator General of the Synod of Bishops, to give an example where he thinks there might be such a need. He cited the role of Parish and Diocesan Pastoral Councils which are currently optional under *Canon Law* but may be necessary in the future. “Today that’s a possibility in *Canon Law*, but I think it should be more than a possibility. Because how can you as a bishop be the pastor of the church if there is no way of knowing what people think and feel about the church? he asked.

Let us pray for and with our Young Adults in Kenya who are going the Portuguese Embassy in Nairobi for their visa interviews to go to World Youth Day in Lisbon in August, 2023.

Kenyan Catholics in the USA held their annual Kenyan Catholic Conference in the Twin Cities of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA this past weekend. Kenyan parents in the USA are committed to their children growing up in local *Jumuiyas* (SCCs). Also Diocesan Twinning

- Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA with Kitui Diocese, Kenya
- St. Cloud Diocese, Minnesota, USA with Homa Bay Diocese, Kenya

is very important for the future development of the worldwide Synodal Catholic Church. One participant wrote: “I think Archbishop Hebda's interest is genuine [in SCCs] and could find expression in the implementation of our post-synodal pastoral plan that intends to reinvigorate the life of our parish communities. And, because of our archdiocesan partnership with the Kitui Diocese, Kenyans could very well be our teachers in this. I'm glad the Holy Spirit is helping to move your conversation along.”

Feedback and Forum:

- “The Kenyan Catholic Conference was filled with good energy with Kenyan Catholics coming from about 12 states across the country. Liz Mach, Mike Haasl and

I also attended on Saturday festivities. Very well done and a clear sign of how the SCCs are a very important part of Kenya faith life in America. Thanks and wonderful to see the email comments from Archbishop Hebda to you as well.”

- "A clear sign of how the SCCs are a very important part of Kenya faith life in America."
- "I have talked with many of these Kenyan immigrant families. They want their children here in the USA to have the same SCCs family formation experience that they had when growing up in Kenya. This crosses ethnic and financial lines."
- “Last weekend was wonderful seeing many Kenyans from several states gathered at St. Alphonsus Catholic Church Hall with the general theme: ‘Walking Together in Faith Amidst Challenges.’ It was a great success."
- “I am just overjoyed to hear that Kenyans in the US are planning to follow through with SCCs for their young ones similar to their upbringing back in Kenya. That is truly heartwarming. I wanted to encourage you to give them the support you can and in case formation/training is required, we can easily deliver this online since we have the tools already prepared. I am interested to know how this progresses and ready to give a hand.”
- “You have a good desire to develop SCCs in the diaspora, especially for the Kenyan communities around the USA using online platforms. I’m open to it and will let them know that, especially the SCCs leaders in Minnesota.”
- “For online SCC training with the age of technology distance is only a ZOOM, Skype, Google Meet, Teams or an MS Teams call away.”

Stimulated by various webinars and gatherings (in person and online) on Synodality and the Synodal Process we are following the Catholic Dioceses in the USA that have Post-Synodal Pastoral Plans. They are not waiting for more gatherings, documents and directives from Rome but following the approved Synodal Process, these dioceses are implementing their Listening Sessions (and their various recommendations) in their own dioceses in the past two years. Here are some leading questions:

1. How can Small Christian Communities (SCCs) reinvigorate the life of our parish communities.
2. How can SCCs be involved in new ministries such as Greeter.
3. How can SCCs be a significant part of the megaparishes being built in states such as Texas and Florida.
4. How can these Small Faith Communities especially among Hispanic Catholics be a new face of the Catholic Church?
5. How can these Small Faith Communities (hybrid meaning both in person and online) develop among graduates (*alumni* and *alumnae*) of both Catholic and secular universities.
6. How can Kenyan Catholics living in the USA who are familiar with the SCCs Model of Church help their parishes and parishioners with formation, education and training. We can take advantage of the many online programs for SCCs formation, education and training.

As we compare the SCCs Pastoral Model of Church to the evolving model of the Synodal Church a report from Rome is quite interesting. For the October, 2023 Synod the Pope Paul VI audience hall will be transformed into a venue for small group, roundtable

discussions. The plan is based on a Latin American ecclesial gathering in Mexico in November, 2021 that included more than 50 small groups for discussion and discernment. This was a communitarian experience that emerged from the grassroots with the People of God as the subject. The premise of the ongoing Synod Process is that the Catholic Church must now convert its authority and structures to create space and formation opportunities for the People of God to participate, assemble and discern.

“Show me the facts” says a researcher. Ellie Hidalgo, co-director of Discerning Deacons says: “The Franciscan Catechists (congregation of religious sisters) have a vocation to be the presence of the Catholic Church in remote lands in Latin America where there are no priests. The Archdiocese of Porto Velho, Brazil spans 33,000 square miles and has 32 priests. By comparison, the USA state of Indiana is nearly 36,000 square miles and has 735 priests as of 2021. The diaconal charisms of Word, liturgy and service that God bestows on women is very much needed at the margins.”

This commitment to diaconal community service is often multigenerational. One older woman was a catechist and a key community leader who catalyzed numerous *comunidades eclesiales de base* (Base Communities or Small Christian Communities) in Porto Velho. She developed a Formation Center that prepared Catholics to lead and sustain a network of vibrant Base Communities in the absence of a priest.

Pope upholds Brazilian BECs' commitment to promote an outgoing Church

By Lisa Zengarini

Pope Francis sends a message of encouragement to a Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) meeting in Brazil, emphasizing that the Catholic Church must never remain “hidden”. Pope Francis has encouraged Brazilian Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) to continue working for an “outgoing” church, saying that a church that goes out to the world is stronger.

He gave this encouragement as the group opened their 15th Inter-ecclesial Meeting, which kicked off on 18 July, 2023 in Rondonópolis, in the Brazilian State of Mato Grosso, on the theme “Basic Ecclesial Communities: an outgoing Church pursuing the full life for all men and women”. This is 15th BECs Inter-ecclesial Meeting. Brazilian BECs held their first national inter-ecclesial meeting in 1975.

The event gathers about 1,500 participants from across Brazil to discuss the current social and economic challenges facing the country, including the negative impact on local communities and the environment of indiscriminate mining activities, and the ongoing commitment of Basic Ecclesial Communities to transform and update the church’s mission in rural areas, urban centers and peripheries.

Participants include representatives of the regional BECs, of indigenous peoples, and of Quilombo communities (descendants of Afro-Brazilian slaves who escaped from slave plantations – ed.), leaders of social organizations linked to the Church, social activists, religious men and women, priests and 63 bishops, as well as guests from other Christian Churches.

Discussions, running until 22 July, 2023 are focused on five thematic areas including: Synodality and Power in the Church; the Political and Social Dimension; the Economy of Francesco; Integral Ecology and Education.

This focus on an "Outgoing Church" corresponds to the practical action/social outreach of the SCCs in Eastern Africa.

"Case Study of How We Started Prisca and Aquila Companions Online Small Christian Community," by Valerie Stroud, 13:47 minutes (from 42:12 minutes to 56:01 minutes) in "Towards Pentecost 2023 -- Signs of the Spirit with companions Kevin Gallagher, Nicholas Postlethwaite and Valerie Stroud," Scottish Laity Network Webinar, Towards Pentecost 2023 ~ Signs of the Spirit with companions Kevin Gallagher, Nicholas Postlethwaite - YouTube. Thursday 18 May, 2023, 1 hour and 28:23 minutes.
<https://youtu.be/LMgikow0AnQ>

For this Towards Pentecost 2023 program the three presenters again reflected on their Synodal Submission and, in the light of their recommendations, sought to discern where there are possible "Signs of the Spirit." This third session, Thursday 18 May, 2023 -- "Where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them" -- was an opportunity to explore how our discipleship can develop through coming together in Small Groups either face to face or online. Kevin, Nicholas and Valerie shared how the current development of Small Ecclesial Groups (SEGs) is located in the "change of era" as affirmed by Pope Francis. There is also a renewed appreciation of the dynamic of Small Group encounters in Scripture. During the conversation ways of setting up and facilitating Small Groups were shared but it was stressed that there is no one model and it depends on the composition of the group and how the Spirit guides and empowers it.

Valerie's Case Study's full title was: "Patrons: Prisca and Aquila Acts 18: A Small Community in Cyberspace in the Catholic Christian Tradition, but welcoming everyone." Her excellent powerpoint describes the creation of the SCC step by step. It meets weekly on Tuesdays on Zoom and communicates regularly through Google Group. 15 companions with 6- 8 each week on Zoom. Lectionary readings are the foundation. Exploring the readings on a Tuesday adds value to the following Sunday celebration of the Word and Eucharist.

Creative combination of Zoom and a Google Group.

I am reading about young people from different countries enjoying the first of two weeks in Portugal – living with host families and experiencing family life and parish life on the local level in different cities in Portugal. I remember when the *Zambian Young People* went to Brazil for two full weeks for the World Youth Day in 2013 and it worked perfectly. One week living with host families in Sao Paulo where they visited the *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEBs) and then one week in Rio de Janeiro for the big events with Pope Francis.

From Alphonse Omolo: "I suppose the opportunity for the youth to have a local-level experience and learn about the occurrence of the SCC or the work of the Catholic Church in the local communities is the peak/foundation of this WYD gathering. This is where cultural exchange takes place with memorable lessons for the youth that they will cherish throughout their lives. Missing this will be saddening but we leave this in the hand of God and continue to pray for his intervention."

From Clif Bachmeier: "Yes, I did the same in Poland for WTD in 2016. Living with host families that first week was unforgettable."

Let us harvest the memories.

Nora, we are praying for you and all the African delegates going to the Synod in Rome in October, 2023. We are blessed to have a team of excellent African theologians -- women and men.

27 July, 2023

Diocese Of Paterson, New Jersey, USA

“Beyond The Beacon”

SEASON 1 EPISODE 17: “An interview with missionary priest Father Joseph Healey, M.M.”

Audio Podcast: 38:25 minutes

[17: An interview with missionary priest Father Joseph Healey, M.M. \(beaconnj.org\)](https://www.beaconnj.org/17-an-interview-with-missionary-priest-father-joseph-healey-m-m/)

YouTube Video: 37.27 minutes

[Beyond The Beacon - 17: An interview with missionary priest Father Joseph Healey, M.M. - YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

This audio podcast/YouTube video covers missionary ministry in Africa, History of Maryknoll, Small Christian Communities, Young Adult Ministry, World Youth Day, Synodality/the Synodal Process, Internet Ministry, Fatima Apparitions, Prayer Solidarity and baseball. In his opening prayer Bishop Kevin Sweeney, the Bishop of Paterson Diocese, connects listening to each other and discerning in the Synodal Process with the 2023 World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal. Bishop Kevin’s Catechetical Session in Spanish in Lisbon on Wednesday, 2 August, 2023 is on the theme: “Environment.” First is the testimonies of young people, and then the bishop responds. This is the synodal process of listening to the views of young people.

It is encouraging that a "SCC language" is influencing our Catholic journalists. For example, Robert Michens writes:

"As for Pope Francis, he will likely use his five days in Portugal to hammer away at some of his greatest concerns for our world. This includes building greater friendship and fraternity (sorority, too) among people at every level -- in families, small communities, cities, nations and the world at large. It also entails caring for planet earth, which is God's creation and the "common home" of all of us who are fortunate enough to be alive. And, above all else, you can expect the pope to forcefully make the case for an end to all wars and armed conflicts around the world, most especially the one Russia has unleashed against Ukraine."

Prayers for and with Bishop Kevin Sweeney of Paterson Diocese, New Jersey, USA who will participate in a Catechetical Session in Spanish in Lisbon, Portugal on Wednesday, 2 August, 2023 on the theme “Environment” (linked to Pope Francis' emphasis on "care of creation"). First is the testimonies of young people, and then the bishop responds. This is synodal process of listening to the views of young people.

Eduardo Campos Lima, “With Pope's Support, Basic Ecclesial Communities in Brazil Show Signs of Revival,” *La Croix International*, 28 July, 2023, *La Croix International* Website, retrieved on 31 July, 2023, <https://international.la-croix.com/.../with-popes.../18212> Once a powerful force in the Brazilian Church (and in Latin America as a whole), the Basic Ecclesial Communities – known as CEBs in Portuguese and Spanish – saw a continuous

decline in the country since the 1990s. Now, with Pope Francis' support and a fresh interest from the younger generation, their members want to grow again. Some 1,000 Basic Ecclesial Communities leaders from all parts of Brazil gathered in July, 2023 to discuss the most pressing issues in the nation, including the need to bring more young Catholics to join them. At the peak of the CEBs' presence in the Brazilian Church, they numbered at least 50,000, Celso Carias said. Now he estimates there are around 20,000 of them. Bishop Luiz Fernando Lisboa of Cachoeiro do Itapemirim in Espírito Santo State, was one of the 50 members of the Brazilian episcopate who attended the gathering in Rondonópolis. He celebrated the fact that so many bishops and priests took part in the meeting, but emphasized that "there is a huge resistance among many in the Catholic Church to accept the CEBs model."



INTERNATIONAL.LA-CROIX.COM

[With pope's support, basic ecclesial communities in Brazil show signs of revival](http://INTERNATIONAL.LA-CROIX.COM)

Well written, insightful critique of CEBs in Brazil.

May our SCC members reflect on: "Like the 2021--2024 Synod, World Youth Day(WYD) is not so much an event as a moment in an ongoing process of spiritual formation. The prognosis for a WYD contribution toward renewal of the Catholic Church depends on many factors including what happens when the young people return home to empty churches and lifeless parishes.

We believe in the Paschal Mystery. We know from Jesus that dying to certain ways of being the Catholic Church can give the strength to overcome denial and fatigue and help us rise up to witness to God's love and the transcendent in today's world.

Read more at:



INTERNATIONAL.LA-CROIX.COM

World Youth Day: participation, perils, promise and prognosis

The abuse of power, position, trust and conscience -- often denied and covered up

We are in solidarity with Bishop Kevin Sweeney and the 40 youth and young adults of Paterson Diocese, New Jersey, USA who are in Lisbon, Portugal for World Youth Day (WYD). I requested that the Paterson Diocese young people pilgrims pray for peace in Africa.

2023 Lisbon, Portugal is the 16th international edition of World Youth Day (WYD). Let us hope and pray that an African city and country is chosen for the 17th international edition in 2025 or 2026.

As we review many surveys and polls on Christian life in the USA, we see a lot of reports on Bible Study Groups (and the lack thereof) but little on Lectionary Based Faith Sharing Small Communities.

Prayer please.

During his pilgrimage to Portugal this week for World Youth Day (WYD) Pope Francis, in a synodal style of "walking together," has been deeply listening to others. To the testimonies of the three young students of different religious confessions – an Evangelist, a Catholic and a Muslim. To 13 victims of clerical sexual abuse in Portugal. To a group of 15 pilgrims who had traveled to Portugal from Ukraine (when the pope kissed the Ukrainian flag). And to others.

Here are some of the Pope Francis' responses especially to young people:

"God always brings some good out of chaos.
There is room in the Catholic Church for everyone! Everyone! Everyone!
Make some noise. Continue to stir things up."
Never be afraid of getting your hands dirty.
Always be there for those in need."

Training Young People for Leadership
Pastoral Program Newsletter

July 2023

Only two of the parishes in the Catholic Diocese of Yei in South Sudan are active due to the dire security situation in the region. Their bishop, Right Reverend Alex Lodiog Sakor, has long dreamed for the development of “Small Christian Communities” (SCCs), not merely as a response to the dire security situation, but even more for the health and vitality of the Catholic faith in the diocese. This five-day training, funded by Missio Munich, was conducted by the Solidarity Pastoral Service and Bishop Sakor gave the opening address for the assembly. The bishop spoke about the importance of SCCs, and further, took this opportunity to acknowledge the important ministries of Solidarity with South Sudan in his diocese and throughout the country. 76 people from parishes and chapels throughout the diocese benefited from this program which was held from 24-28 July 2023.

Where there is a shortage of active, male celebrate priests -- called the Eucharistic Famine or the Eucharistic Hunger. Compare the following pastoral solution with the ideas of Bishop Fritz Lobinger:

Priests all share in the priesthood of their bishop. The communities propose their leaders to the bishop, irrespective of gender or marital status. The bishop ordains them either temporarily or permanently after he is satisfied that they are suitable and that he/she is able to share his/her priesthood with them to administer the sacraments and preside at Mass. This is no Eucharist more radical than the early Christian Church. I hope and pray that the Synod would have the courage and faith to countenance such a proposal.

Mary Lilly Driciru, “UGANDA: AMECEA To Celebrate Small Christian Communities Golden Jubilee,” *AMECEA Online Newsletter*, 11 August, 2023, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 11 August, 2023, [UGANDA: AMECEA To Celebrate Small Christian Communities Golden Jubilee](#)

There is need to promote campaigns for mass recruitment of members into SCCs. Home visits are also recommended for promoting children, youth and men participation in SCCs. Father Kaganda noted that they will use the mass media to promote key characteristics of SCCs and strengthen training and formation of leadership of SCCs focusing on the true spirit and characteristics of SCCs.

In this jubilee year the region desires that vivid information about a true picture of the SCCs be established: their numbers; their level of participation; the number of times they meet to share the Word of God; whether they are represented in the administrative structure in the Parish/Diocese. He added: “We desire to see the successes of the SCCs in the Local Church. We need to know how the church in the neighborhood has profited from SCCs. We also need to know the concrete programs carried out by the SCCs in building the church.”

On Thursday 10 August, 2023 young people (2 from Indonesia, 3 from Kenya, 1 from Tanzania and Pakistan) from the Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community participated in an interview that was organized by the Spirit Unbounded organization to share how the Young Seekers Community has transformed their lives. Spirit Unbounded wants to use the interview in promoting the Young Seekers activities during the Upcoming People Synod in October, 2023. Thanks so very much for creating time for the interview.

Let us share the experience of the Young Seekers SCCs with the rest of the world in our ongoing Synodal Process.

In addition to the year 2023 celebrating the Golden Jubilee Year of Small Christian Communities (SCCs): 50 Years (1973 to 2023) from July, 2023 to July, 2024, we are celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Pan African Episcopal Committee for Social Communications (CEPACS). Founded in 1973 by the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) for the Church in Africa, CEPACS was given the mandate of promoting the use of modern means of mass communications as tools of evangelization in the African Church. The celebration event will take place in Lagos, Nigeria from 18 – 21 November 2023.

Homily by Father Joseph Healey, MM
Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary Parish
Morristown, New Jersey, USA
20th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A
19-20 August, 2023

Theme: “Welcome to an Inclusive Catholic Church”

In my homily I will mention Bishop Kevin and the Paterson Young People Delegation going to Portugal for World Youth Day (WYD) and the hope of keeping in communication with the Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community based in Nairobi, Kenya.

Stella Zulu, “AMECEA To Celebrate 50 Years of Small Christian Communities,” "AMECEA Online Newsletter," 18 August, 2023, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 18 August, 2023,



[COMMUNICATIONS.AMECEA.ORG](https://communications.amecea.org)
[AMECEA To Celebrate 50 Years of Small Christian Communities](https://communications.amecea.org)

It is interesting how popular sayings and proverbs enter into the mainstream and popular culture. For years we have been using the Spanish proverb that popular with the Base or Basic Christian Communities in Latin America: *We create the path by walking*. This is based on the Spanish poem:

Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar.

wanderer, there is no road, the road is made by walking.

of the Spanish poet Antonio Machado (1875 – 1939).

Now there is a TV Ad for the scotch whiskey Johnnie Walker that uses the saying: *We make the path by walking*. Antonio Machado.

In the final section of our SCCs Workshop in Malawi on 21 August, 2023 on the “The Way Forward,” George facilitated very well writing “Recommendations” on the big screen.

Related to reaching out to Young People I liked in particular: "Ongoing formation and training of new student SCCs leaders in universities and colleges." A good example is Kenyatta University. After graduation are the new SCC student leaders formed and trained on a regular basis?

Related to parishes. When new SCC leaders are elected, are the new SCC leaders formed and trained on a regular basis?

In our SCCs workshops, seminars and weekly Bible reflection and sharing we want to continue to use "synodal language" and know the reason behind it. For example, using "gathering" rather than "meeting." The word "meeting" usually implies a business agenda.

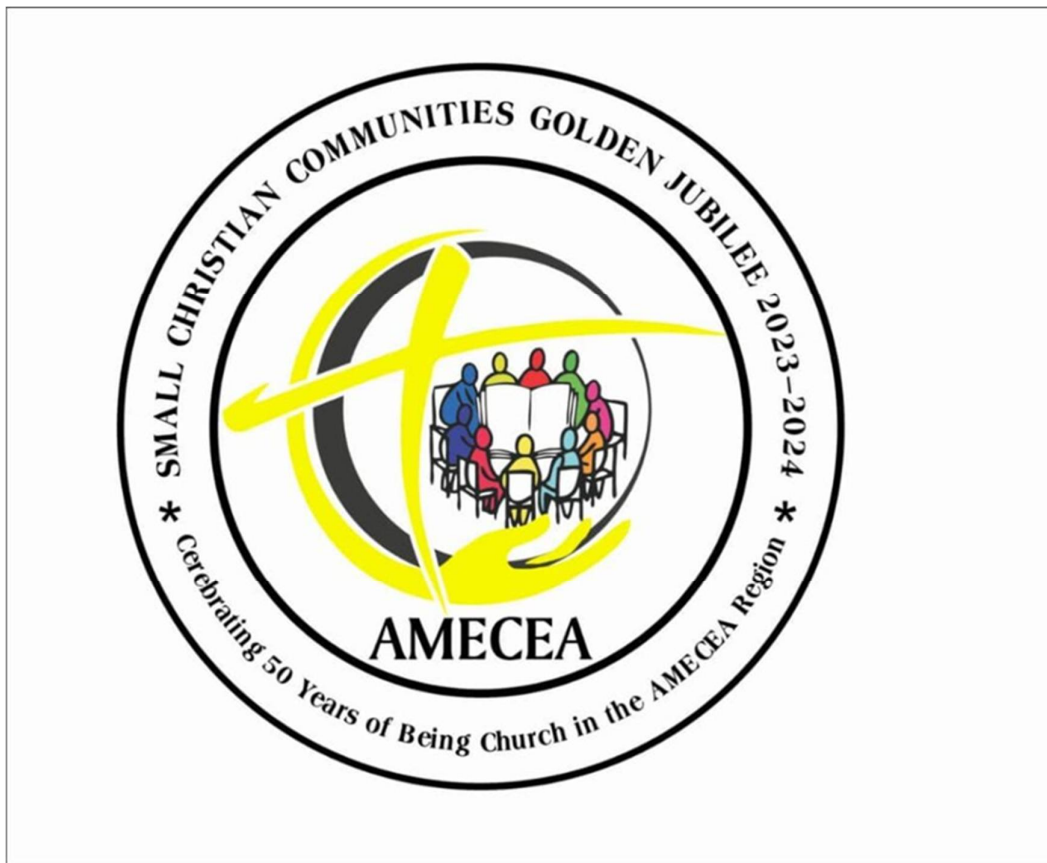
May our SCC members pray for and with Pope Francis and his special intentions: peace in the Ukraine and the Holy Spirit's guidance at the Synod in October, 2023.

We try to use our Golden Jubilee Prayer during our weekly online SCC gatherings.

Report from Archbishop George Desmond Tambala, OCD of Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi:

"I really appreciate the very kind words you have shared with us regarding how our Archdiocese of Lilongwe has had three synods already since Vatican II. Last year we launched the third synod which has involved all the faithful, priests and religious as well as non Catholics. We are grateful to God for the very rich reflections that we have so far received from all corners of the Archdiocese. The 'praxis ' of reflection for the whole synod is the SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY. That is where most of the discussions are happening. We have had two phases and we are in the second phase focusing on Liturgy and participation in the Social Arena and in this phase we will be reflecting on what the Catholic Church is engaged in (education, health, social action and development and related witness). We will of course not forget to reflect on the environment and mission and of course on ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. it is a very busy but extremely fruitful time. We cannot but thank Bishop Patrick Kalilombe who led this spirit incarnated in the Small Christian Communities. We will be concluding this synod in December this year 2023."

As we regularly pray our Golden Jubilee Prayer let us reflect on our logo especially the SCC members sitting in a circle with the *Bible* in the middle and the loving and caring yellow hand:



These are some of the pictures from the SCCs 50th Jubilee Anniversary and Workshop that took place in Dedza and Lilongwe, Malawi between 19 - 22 August 2023. The Workshop and Launch were organized by AMECEA with the leadership of Father Emmanuel Chimombo. Various topics were discussed by the facilitators including: The History of the SCC Model of Church and Three Synods in Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi, Centrality of the Word of God, Facilitation Skills, What are SCCs, Models of SCCs, Role of the Laity and Steps of Bible Sharing. Our facilitators were: Alphonse Omolo, Kenya, Father Emmanuel Chimombo, Kenya, George Thuku, Kenya, Alloys Nyakundi, Kenya and Father Joe Healey, USA. The workshop brought together delegates from different AMECEA countries (Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Malawi, Ethiopia, Sudan and South Sudan). This was not the end of the celebration but a beginning of celebrations in different local dioceses.





Glad to see a photo of Mwanajumuiya Alloys Nyakundi and Archbishop George Desmond Tambala of Lilongwe Archdiocese.







Oyee. May this ongoing Golden Jubilee of SCCs in Eastern Africa be both a celebration and a learning experience -- through evaluation and grassroots experience how to make our SCC Model of Church better.

New article:

Agnes Aineah, "Church in AMECEA Seeking to Grow Small Christian Communities in Yearlong Celebrations," "ACI Africa Online News Service," 25 August, 2023, retrieved on the ACI Africa Website on 26 August, 2023,



[Church in AMECEA Seeking to Grow Small Christian Communities in Yearlong Celebrations \(aciafrica.org\)](https://www.aciafrica.org)

Excellent article with only one mistake: The training (workshop) was on two days: Sunday, 20 August, 2023 and Monday, 21 August 2023.

Francis Damaseke, "AMECEA: The Church has Everything for Every One: Archbishop Tambala to Christians," *AMECEA Online News*, Issue 499, 25 August, 2023, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 29 August, 2023,



communications.amecea.org

[AMECEA: The Church has Everything for Every One: Archbishop Tambala to Christians](https://communications.amecea.org)

We SCC members continue to pray for the Synod on Synodality to Rome in October, 2023. Here is what Pope Francis said yesterday:

"The upcoming Synod on Synodality may be 'of little interest to the general public,' but the synod is "truly important" for the Catholic Church. He appealed to journalists to help the Church "rediscover the word together." "In just over a month, bishops and lay people from all over the world will meet here in Rome for a Synod on synodality: listening together, discerning together, praying together," he explained, noting that the word 'together' is very important in a culture of exclusion.

Acknowledging that to speak of a "Synod on Synodality" may seem somewhat "abstruse, self-referential, excessively technical, of little interest to the general public," the Pope said that what is happening with the Church's synodal journey is something truly important for the Church. "Please, let us get used to listening to each other, to talking, not cutting our heads off for a word. To listen, to discuss in a mature way. This is a grace we all need to move forward. And it is something the Church today offers the world, a world so often so incapable of making decisions, even when our very survival is at stake. We are trying to learn a new way of living relationships, listening to one another to hear and follow the voice of the Spirit," he said.

Reiterating that synod participants want to contribute together to building a Church where everyone feels at home, where no one is excluded, Pope Francis reiterated his request “to the masters of journalism” for help to “tell this process for what it really is, leaving behind the logic of slogans and pre-packaged stories.”

We can learn a lot from the SCCs and the BECs in Asia. See Digal, Santosh, “Estella Padilla: My Experience with Filipino Basic Ecclesial Communities at the Synod,” PIME AsiaNews, retrieved on PIME AsiaNews Website on 27 August, 2023,



ASIANEWS.IT

[ECCLESIA IN ASIA Estela Padilla: 'My Experience with Filipino Basic Ecclesial Communities at the Synod'](#)

To initiate a Forum Exchange, Matt Rousso, Director of the Maryknoll Affiliate Gulf South Chapter in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA wrote. "Do you think SCCs could ever be used in the USA as a vital way to be church. I think the traditional parish is outmoded and ineffective?"

Please give your feedback/comments below.

I responded: "Thanks for your question. I have been thinking about this question for over 40 years!!! Way back is the 1980s, we thought the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church could be a good fit in the USA. We thought that the parish could be a “communion of neighborhood SCCs.” But the power and influence of secularism and the independent/privacy culture of America have been too strong. We still have a Small Group Model of Church in many American parishes, but this is different. We have written a lot about this in the “Forum” of our

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/www.smallchristiancommunities.org>

This Facebook Page was formed to share Small Christian Communities (SCCs) information, events, materials, news, videos and photos for each of the six continents. It serves as a forum for an exchange of SCCs ideas and to promote dialog on SCC topics. The

page has sections for “Like,” “Comment” and “Share.” It is classified as a society and culture website. We welcome any and all feedback, contributions, SCCs materials, etc.

One example: At the heart/center of the SCCs Model of Church is weekly Lectionary based Faith Sharing when we read the Gospel of the following Sunday and apply it to our daily lives. Relatively few Catholics in the USA do this.

Perhaps the current Synod Process and the Digital World (online SCCs) will help us move in a new direction.

Some comments:

1. From Clif Bachmeier: “About ten years ago I visited a local Quaker Church out of curiosity. I quickly learned that they have Small Growth Groups that meet regularly to grow in their faith and build community. I was impressed by their groups because they were also working with another organization to welcome refugees to Sacramento. We got to set up their apartment, pick them up from the airport, and take them to Target so they can buy additional needed items. I think this is what church is supposed to be like.”

2. Thank you, Clif. In the SCCs Model of Church there are two main pillars: Weekly lectionary based faith sharing and regular practical action/social action outreach. The second pillar is similar to the Quaker Church Model.

3. In our free online Ebook we document the successes and failures of the SCCs Model of Church in the USA. There are a very few Catholic Dioceses and some scattered Catholic Parishes that follow this model. But the Busy Parish Plant Model with all kinds of small groups is more common. In middle class Catholic Parishes our research shows neighborhood SCCs do not succeed because the parishioners do not want to be vulnerable, that is, to share their lives in a small community.

4. In commenting on the Synodal Process Pope Francis refers to "the joy of seeing how from small parish groups, from small church groups [similar to SCCs], very beautiful reflections emerge and there is great ferment, it is a joy." I wish the pope would use the term “base community.”

5. Tom Ryan writes: "It was great to see your question to Fr. Joe Healey and to see Joe's response! The SCC website is a great resource. Also Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM) at the University of Loyola in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA is very involved in synodality efforts and offers courses in SCC formation."

6. Glad that Tom has kept this SCCs string going. We are hopeful that the Synodal Process will give new energy and creativity to the SCCs Model of Church. In our SCCs Poll: Eighty-Seventh Round (September - October, 2023): “The best part of my Small Christian Community is...” One choice is: "Where the faithful experience and live Synodality as mission, participation and communion."

You can vote at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org>



Small Christian Communities

Okoth, Jecinter, “AMECEA Launches Golden Jubilee Year for SCCs, Prelate Emphasizes a Period of Reflection and Discernment,” “AMECEA Online News,” Issue 499, 25 August, 2023, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 28 August, 2023, <https://communications.amecea.org/.../amecea-launches.../>

The region of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) in Dedza, Diocese, Malawi on Saturday, 19 August 2023, launched a year-long celebration of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) since its establishment, where Archbishop George Desmond Tambala of Malawi’s Lilongwe Archdiocese encouraged reflection and discernment moments as a way to understand deeply SCCs. “Small Christian Community is a great tool for the Church, actually we cannot think of the Catholic Church without the Small Christian Communities as we launch 50 years in the region.”



[COMMUNICATIONS.AMECEA.ORG](https://communications.amecea.org)
AMECEA Launches Golden Jubilee Year for SCCs, Prelate Emphasizes a Period of Reflection and Discernment

Francis Damaseke, “AMECEA: The Church has Everything for Every One: Archbishop Tambala to Christians,” *AMECEA Online News*, Issue 499, 25 August, 2023, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 29 August, 2023,



communications.amecea.org

[AMECEA: The Church has Everything for Every One: Archbishop Tambala to Christians](#)

Okoth, Jecinter, “AMECEA: Family Life and SCCs, Ecclesial Models that Promote Synodality in AMECEA Region, Says AMECEA Chairman,” *AMECEA Online News*, Issue 499, 15 March, 2024, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 16 March, 2024, <https://communications.amecea.org/index.php/2024/03/15/amecea-family-life-and-sccs-ecclesia-models-that-promote-sydonality-in-amecea-region-says-amecea-chairman>

The foundation of synodality in the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) is the recognition of the significance of family life and the existence of well-established Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the region, AMECEA chairman has said during a webinar session held on Thursday, March 14. The webinar aimed to reflect on the experience of the themes that emerged during the first phase of the synodal journey that was held last year October in Rome.

Okoth, Jecinter, “AMECEA: Goal of the SCCs Golden Jubilee is to Reawaken Spirituality, says AMECEA’s Chairman for Pastoral Department,” *AMECEA Online News*, Issue 499, 25 August, 2023, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 29 August, 2023, <https://communications.amecea.org/index.php/2023/08/25/amecea-goal-of-the-sccs-golden-jubilee-is-to-reawaken-spirituality-says-ameceas-chairman-for-pastoral-department/>

Okoth, Jecinter, “AMECEA: “Other Christian Churches and Continents Treasure Small Christian Communities in AMECEA AMECEA Online News, Issue 499, 25 August, 2023, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 29 August, 2023, [AMECEA: Other Christian Churches and Continents Treasure Small Christian Communities in AMECEA](#)



[COMMUNICATIONS.AMECEA.ORG](https://communications.amecea.org)

AMECEA: Other Christian Churches and Continents Treasure Small Christian Communities in AMECEA

Mwenya Mukuka, "ZAMBIA: SCCs in Zambia's Livingstone Diocese, Transforming Lives through Faith and Fellowship," "AMECEA Online News," Issue 499, 25 August, 2023, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 29 August, 2023, <https://communications.amecea.org/.../zambia-sccs-in.../>

This article is an interesting Case Study of how 504 Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Livingstone Diocese in Zambia are celebrating the Golden Jubilee (1973 to 2023) of SCCs in the AMECEA Region. Father John Rurangwa, the Pastoral Coordinator in Livingstone Diocese, reports that the celebration will be on Saturday, 2 December 2023. The occasion of the Golden Jubilee celebration will be being used to reflect upon the SCCs' journey, their impact on the community, and their ongoing mission of evangelization. Each SCC will celebrate its Patron Saint with a sense of unity and mirror the ongoing Synod of Bishops on Synodality to ensure that no one is left behind. Ongoing formation in leadership, biblical and liturgical understanding and enhanced participation of youth and children will all be central to the jubilee celebration.



COMMUNICATIONS.AMECEA.ORG

ZAMBIA: SCCs in Zambia's Livingstone Diocese, Transforming Lives through Faith and Fellowship

What does the Pope's September, 2023 prayer intention -- "For people living on the margins" -- mean to SCCs members? Please respond below:

The pope invites everyone to:

- Pray for and assist people living on the margins of society.
- Pay attention to people who face marginalization, even if it results from poverty, addictions, mental illness or disability. Specific examples: homeless people, street children washing car windshields, people with various disabilities.
- Offer a culture of welcoming, of providing shelter, of giving a home, of offering love, of giving human warmth.
- Those living in subhuman living conditions.
- Welcoming is more than helping: it means putting the other person at our level.

Let us reach out with prayers, deep sympathy and financial support to our friend Ashknaz Khokhar and all the terrible happenings going on in Pakistan.

As Mwanajumuiya Alloys Nyakundi points out, this social outreach and practical action is part of the Outer or Public Life of SCCs.

ANNOUNCEMENT: It is important that we continue to evaluate our SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa so we can make it better. Please vote in the current polls Eighty-Seventh Round – “The best part of my Small Christian Community is:..” (September -- October, 2023):

1. Praying together for the Synod to take place in Rome in October, 2023.
2. Where the faithful experience and live Synodality as mission, participation and communion.
3. Center of evangelization to the family and youth.
4. Praying together for the Golden Jubilee of SCCs in Eastern Africa.
5. Weekly lectionary-based faith sharing is the preferred methodology.
6. Pray for and assist people living on the margins of society.

Vote at:



SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

Small Christian Communities – Small Christian Communities

Small Christian Communities

From Francis Njuguna, a long time Kenya writer on SCCs: "I have already voted. I like the line up. Long live the SCCs."

These are six important choices for our SCCs Model of Church -- praying for special intentions, focusing on lectionary-based faith sharing and reaching out to the needy such as people living on the margins. All show how SCCs are an expression of our evolving Synodal Catholic Church. Please encourage people to vote and then live out these choices.

NEW POST ANNOUNCEMENT:

Bishop Patrick Kalilombe and the Lilongwe Diocese, Malawi Mini Synod in 1973-75: One of the Foundations of the AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Pastoral Priority Leading Up to the Two “Synod on Synodality” Sessions in 2023 and 2024 - By Joseph G. Healey, MM

“Good morning. As I travel around the world I always introduce myself by saying: “I am Joe Healey. I am a member of the St. Isidore of Seville International Online Skype Small Christian Communities. I am a student, a learner.” As we gather here in Malawi to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of SCCs, do we remember..... Read more >>Link Below

SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

smallchristiancommunities.org

I have included feedback from the participants and additional theological reflection and documentation. There are now 46 footnotes and 18 Hyperlinks. It is now posted on our SCCs Website at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/bishop-patrick...> Please circulate this Final Version to the workshop participants and anyone else who is interested. It will be published in the AMECEA Golden Jubilee Book in 2024.

Upon review I see this article as an interesting Case Study in the ongoing Synodal Process in Africa and throughout the world. The article documents the important role of SCCs in three Mini-Synods in Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi:

1. 1973—1975.
2. 2004 -- 2006.
3. 2021—2023.



SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

Small Christian Communities

[Small Christian Communities](http://SmallChristianCommunities.org)

Mwenya Mukuka, “AMECEA: Fr. Joseph Healey, MM: A Guide in the Journey of Small Christian Communities,” *AMECEA Online News*, Special Issue 502, 1 September, 2023, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 2 September, 2023, [AMECEA: Fr. Joseph Healey, MM: A Guide in the Journey of Small Christian Communities](#)

As the sun sets over the vibrant city of Lilongwe, Malawi history, faith, and community converge in a remarkable celebration—the Golden Jubilee Year of Small Christian Communities (SCCs). This jubilee, held from July 2023 to July 2024, commemorates 50 years of SCCs’ existence, their growth, and their transformative impact on the Local and Universal Church. As the Universal Church gathers in Rome for the Synod on Synodality, the journey of SCCs finds resonance in the theme “Communion, Participation, and Mission.” This theme aligns seamlessly with the essence of SCCs that have demonstrated that a Catholic Church rooted in local communities can effectively foster communion, participation, and mission.

Henriette, Anne, “AMECEA: Lay Leadership Trained on New Innovative Approaches to SCCs,” *AMECEA Online News*, Special Issue 502, 1 September, 2023, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 3 September, 2023,



COMMUNICATIONS.AMECEA.ORG

AMECEA: Lay Leadership Trained on New Innovative Approaches to SCCs

Sr. Henriette Anne, FSSA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) provide a platform for believers to come together, share their faith journeys, and reflect on scriptures in a communal and prayerful manner. At the workshop of lay leadership in the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Afr...

[AMECEA: Lay Leadership Trained on New Innovative Approaches to SCCs](#)

Okoth, Jecinter, "AMECEA: Small Christian Communities is Anchored on the Word of God: AMECEA's Pastoral Coordinator," "AMECEA Online News, Issue 500, 1 September, 2023, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 2 September, 2023,



COMMUNICATIONS.AMECEA.ORG

AMECEA: Small Christian Communities is Anchored on the Word of God: AMECEA's Pastoral Coordinator

Sr. Jecinter Antoinette Okoth, FSSA The Spiritual strengthening

[AMECEA: Small Christian Communities is Anchored on the Word of God: AMECEA's Pastoral Coordinator](#)

Anne, Henriette, "AMECEA: SCCs Pastoral Agents Equipped with Skills after the 50 Years Launch," AMECEA Online News, Special Issue 502, 1 September, 2023, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 3 September, 2023,



COMMUNICATIONS.AMECEA.ORG

AMECEA: SCCs Pastoral Agents Equipped with Skills after the 50 Years Launch

The Australasian Catholic Coalition for Church Reform (ACCCR) is focused on the following areas:

1. Governance

Any restoration of public trust in the church will be dependent on a commitment to contemporary ethical standards of good governance based on the principles of transparency, accountability and inclusivity. There can be no theological justification for poor governance, structures and practices. There needs to be a complete re-think, a renovation, of the concept of church so as to be more relevant in the 21st century. The construction of an Australian Council of the Laity will be a positive step in the right direction. A renewed view of service through the development of truly synodal faith communities, Small Christian Communities, is the desired end in this time of radical change, described by Pope Francis as a 'change of era'.

Today's American Catholic Website points out: "We see the SCC and synodal-church movements as closely interrelated. On our Mikroi Page, we've begun sharing reflections on the weekly readings as well as experiences of synodal and communal prayer that we hope to expand in the months to come." Go to:



TODAYSAMERICANCATHOLIC.ORG

Mikroi - Today's American Catholic

Information about our small Christian community initiative.

People ask how they can access my articles and books free online, that is, on the internet. Two sources are:

Academia.edu

<https://princeton.academia.edu/JosephHealey>

ResearchGate

<https://www.researchgate.net/home.Home.html>

My books and articles are accessible in the Tangaza Repository of Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya at this link:

<http://repository.tangaza.ac.ke/discover?scope=%2F&query=Healey%2C+Joseph&submit=>

There are 54 articles – some written by me, others where I have advised students on their research.

I try to keep in touch with my St. Kizito SCC in Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya. Recently wrote to the *wanajumuiya*: "Greet all the *Wanajumuiya* for me. Recently I gave an online talk (being sent by File Attachment) on Zoom. I wore the white shirt with red cuffs with the logo:

“St. Kizito SCC Waruku
One Heart One Mind”

that you made for me. This symbolizes our continuing bond. I regularly communicate with St. Kizito SCC’s What’sApp Small Community. Prayers for all your special intentions especially those living on the margins of society. Prayers as we celebrate 50 years of SCCs in Eastern Africa. See our SCC Poll at:



smallchristiancommunities.org

Kindly let us vote! Your vote, your voice.

Let celebrate the history of our SCCs.

Maria Clara Lucchetti Bingemer, a theology professor at the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro, Argentina said: "In Pope Francis' decision to create a more open-ended *Working Document* for the synod in October, 2023, we see the influence of Latin American Ecclesial Base Communities [similar to SCCs], that have "a horizontal model of being church" and worship in small groups.

The Feast of St. Phoebe on 3 September, 2023 is a reminder of the House Churches or Household Churches – a type of SCC -- both in the First Century and in the Catholic Church today.

“[T]here are many local churches and basic communities of Christians who, in their liturgical celebrations and their criticism of society, which is not simply theoretical, but also practical, act as landmarks where the original story of God and Jesus can be recognized. They also act as magnets, attracting all kinds of people who have left the official churches and others who may not be Christians at all, but who encounter authentic community experience in these basic communities. They are usually ecumenical and consist of people of all kinds and all shades of opinion. But these people certainly form a genuine community and one that is fully in keeping with the gospel and even before they are properly aware of it, they are part of the living Judaeo-Christian tradition.”

– Edward Schillebeeckx, *God Is New Each Moment*

SCC members are invited to participate in the event:

“Together - Gathering of the People of God”

An Ecumenical Prayer Vigil will take place on Saturday, 30 September, 2023 in St. Peter's Square in Rome. Pope Francis and representatives of different Christian Churches will attend the vigil. The vigil is intended to unite people in praise, silence, and listening to the Word. It is called: “Together - Gathering of the People of God” during which the Catholic Church will entrust the work of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops. Everyone is invited to the prayer vigil. The official two hour vigil will be from 5 to 7 pm Rome time, that is 11 am to 1 pm New York time and 6 to 8 pm Nairobi time. The prayer vigil will be livestreamed through Vatican Media and other networks.

For more information go to this link:



[TOGETHER2023.NET](https://together2023.net)
Provisional programme

A Jesus Caritas Fraternity is a type of SCC and faith sharing small community. It can be only for priests, only for lay people or mixed. Here is a description from *America Magazine* about Kansas City, Kansas, USA:

"Father Scott is also in a faith-sharing group that belongs to the Jesus Caritas Fraternity of Priests in the United States. He meets with several area priests each month for prayer, a meal and conversation about life and ministry. His group has been meeting regularly for years. Similar faith sharing groups for priests are popular in Kansas City, Minneapolis, Denver and in other dioceses. I wondered: Could these priests live together? Each would then need to drive from their common residence to his parish. What if one was reassigned to a parish 60 minutes away? Some bishops encourage (or require) their seminarians and young priests to join these groups as a structure of fraternity and support."

For more background see the book: Victor Edwin, (ed.), *Brother To All: The Life and Witness of St. Charles de Foucauld* (11 Essays on Different Themes Around Charles de Foucauld) (Orbis Books, 2022). Available from Orbis Books at: <https://orbisbooks.com/>



ORBISBOOKS.COM
 Orbis Books

New Article Announcement: "Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community's View on Why a Small Christian Community Is Important and What Happens in Small Communities That Doesn't Happen in More Traditional Larger Church Gatherings." By Kristiana Aurel and Alloys Nyakundi
<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/online-young-adult.../>

Our "Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community" is a digital place for young people from all over the world to come and exchange ideas on why Small Christian

Communities (SCCs) are so important for young people and what the difference is between gathering in a Small Christian Community and gathering in a traditional church. The Online Young Adult Seekers of Small Christian Communities met and exchanged ideas through Zoom on 17 August 2023. Here are some answers in a pdf File from five young men and three young women. Six are from Kenya, one from Tanzania and one from Indonesia. There are seven hyperlinks. The article is posted on our SCC Website under Africa (African Continent, Kenya and Tanzania) and Asia (Indonesia and Pakistan).

Exchanging ideas is one of the many ways SCCs members can listen to one another.

In our SCCs we use the SEE, DISCERN, AND ACT Pastoral Theological Reflection Process or Method. The word “discern” preferred over “judge” and is taken from Pope Francis’ writings.

Over the years the meaning of words change. “Judge” is now often connected to “judgmental.” This extends to many expressions that having a negative, judgmental, even prejorative tone and should be avoided: (alphabetically) cohabitating, fallen-away Catholic, inactive Catholic, lapsed Catholic, living in sin, prodigal child, wayward person. The word “discern” is connected to “discernment” in the ongoing Synodal Process.

In our weekly **Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community** Gathering today we responded to Agenda No. 3: "Outreach to other young people who are struggling and don't have a safe space like the one CCRI has created for the Young Seekers. Report on what each of us is doing." Reports were given by young people from Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, Tanzania and USA. 14 people participated.

I spoke about praying for and with the Black American Young Men in Baltimore, Maryland, USA (my hometown). There is a lot of violence and unrest in downtown Baltimore, even regular killings. Prayers please.

Monthly Day of Prayer for the Synod – September, 2023

"Embracing life as it comes"

Jesus, we see you in the Gospels
 welcoming everyone who was close to you,
 like the man with evil spirits or the man with the withered hand.
 We see You walking with the disciples of Emmaus
 or giving comfort to the widow
 who has lost her only child.
 You taught us to embrace life as it comes,
 to focus on people,
 no matter who they are or what they have experienced.
 Give us your grace and your light
 to imprint “your style” in the Church,
 to understand the others as they are
 to understand them from the depths of their hearts
 beyond their words and actions.
 May we be an open-hearted Church,
 a Church that is receptive and walks with others.
 Amen.

The creation, already in 2021, in collaboration with the World Pope's Prayer Network and the UISG (International Union of Superiors General), of a site (www.prayforthesynod.va) that proposes a specific prayer time for the Synod every first Monday of the month. www.prayforthesynod.va

From Janet Hauter: "I am testing a hypothesis of engaging an SCC on Zoom soon, within the month with a different twist, i.e., beginning with a focus on the "Signs of the Times" instead of the traditional model."

I answered Janet: "In Eastern Africa we have been researching this topic for over 20 years!!! We follow the "both...and approach." If you go into our free, online Ebook" Healey, Joseph, 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 revised and updated from the 2012 print version, is available as a free, online Ebook containing 1,462 pages as of 17 September 2023 on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative website: https://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf

There is a section just on Janet's topic on pages 1071-1072 . We write:

8. Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection/Bible—Daily Life Connections. Connect, relate and apply the Bible (Gospel) to our daily lives and experience (on both personal and society-wide levels). This is lectionary-based faith-sharing/gospel-based faith-sharing. SCC members share their reflections sitting together in a circle and for a maximum of five minutes. This is the most important part of the weekly meeting of the SCC. Sometimes the SCC uses a Daily Life-Bible Connections Method. Start with special themes and topics as well as our experiences and events of daily life and then go to the Bible. Use the "See," "Discern" and "Act" process of the Pastoral Spiral/Circle/Cycle. Both ways are an experience of faith-sharing.

Our Daily Life-Bible Connections Method is exactly what Janet describes: "Begin with the "Signs of the Times." That is, go from daily life to the Bible.

"In an effort to enlighten the region of Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) on *Laudato Si'* guidelines document that was launched at the close of the 20th Plenary Assembly of AMECEA bishops last year in Dar es salaam, Tanzania, the department of Promoting Integral Human Development (PIHD) is set to create awareness to member conferences so as to own the document.

"There is a need to have an implementation strategy of *Laudato Si'* Guidelines to help member conferences familiarize themselves with the document so they can go beyond just having it in shelves but to act," AMECEA's Coordinator for the PIHD, Father Paul Mung'athia Igweta said in an interview Thursday, September 14, prior to the first workshop to be held in Kenya.

According to Igweta, the workshops on creating awareness on *Laudato Si'* implementation guidelines in the region, will help to strategize how the guidelines can be spoken about and understood in dioceses, parishes, and various groups in the Catholic Church including Small Christian Communities (SCCs)."

It is encouraging that SCCs are part of this awareness project. This brings care of creation down to the grassroots level. This is very timely as we are in the middle of the annual "Care of Creation Month" that runs from 1 September to 4 October.

Important SCCs Documentation:

Join-Lambert, Arnaud, "Synodes Diocésains, 'Parasynodes' et Conciles Particuliers dans l'Église Catholique Depuis le Concile Vatican II: Liste, Bibliographie, Ressources," Louvain: Université Catholique de Louvain, 10e édition mise à jour (11 October, 2022). 113 pages. [Les synodes diocésains parasynodes et co \(2\).pdf](#)

The document presents a list of more than 1000 diocesan synods celebrated since 1965. Included are "parasynods" as a significant form of synodality. This term refers to alternative forms, forums or diocesan assemblies that are very similar to a diocesan synod from the phenomenological and ecclesiological point of view. Particular councils, both plenary and provincial, have also been added, as well as national processes with a similar dynamic. There are also active links to certain documents on the Internet. A bibliography is given at the national and diocesan levels. This is followed by a general bibliography on the whole question of diocesan synods.

There are many fine print and online liturgical resources that emphasize daily (especially Sunday) lectionary-based faith sharing that starts from experience and connects the Gospel to daily life. One of the best, if not the best, is:

FaithND Daily Reflection

<http://faith.nd.edu/s/1210/faith/interior.aspx?sid=1210...>

Under the heading "Gospel Reflection from Notre Dame," this resource is available in a daily free email from the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana, USA and at FaithND – on outreach of Alumni Association -- on the Notre Dame website [FaithND - Home](#). The email is sent out at 4 a.m. ET every morning. The reflection has 101,000 subscribers and a 62% "open" rate -- very high according to professional standards. Each reflection is 300 words.

It is also in the ND Mobile App available on a smartphone. Many people read this reflection as the first activity that they do upon waking up each morning as a kind of Morning Prayer -- even setting their smartphone wake up time to begin the day with this reflection.

The authors/contributors are dedicated lay people connected to Notre Dame: alumni (men and women) from both undergraduate and graduate levels, current students, parents and friends. Over the years I have found the reflections of women particularly deep and meaningful. The reflections begin with a personal experience, a story a striking quotation, a striking statistic. Often the reflections gives a fresh perspective and insight on a Gospel passage. All the reflections are available on the FaithND Website Archives from 2013 to the present.

A specific example is the Feast of Saint Matthew, Apostle and evangelist on 21 September, 2023. It uses the Gospel of Matthew 9:9-13. After the text of the Gospel the author -- Jane Feliz Rush Notre Dame, Class of 1994, ACE Cohort 1, Notre Dame Parent -- writes:

Reflection - September 21, 2023

Repite connigo: Todos, todos, todos [Portuguese]. (“Repeat with me: Everyone, everyone, everyone.”)

Pope Francis proclaimed this message to 1.5 million young people at World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal this past August, 2023. He later emphasized that the church is open to everyone, including “the sick, the elderly, the young, old, ugly, beautiful, good, and bad.”

In today’s gospel, Jesus calls Matthew, a toll collector for Rome, to follow him. The Pharisees there in Capernaum, publicly challenge Jesus’ honor by asking his disciples why he eats with tax collectors and sinners—scandalous behavior, in their opinion. Yet, Jesus maintains that “those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do.”

Then, quoting the Prophet Hosea, Jesus tells the Pharisees to learn what these words mean: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice” (*Hosea* 6:6). While the Pharisees upheld that the sacrifice of ritual purity and Sabbath observance was paramount in following the Torah, they seemed much less aware of the centrality of mercy.

Today, we easily separate our actions and inactions from the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, but I wonder. Have we learned the meaning of showing mercy instead of emphasizing sacrifice? Do we invite, ignore or even shun those in our communities who we assume are not worthy of stepping into our church, seeking healing, hope, and mercy from the God of love we profess?

I can’t help but reflect on the closeness and tenderness with which Jesus shared his very self with social outcasts. Can we do the same? Can we sit at the table where Jesus sat, sharing our lives and healing wounds? May we continue to contemplate profoundly and unfold meaningfully in our lives, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.”



FAITH.ND.EDU

<https://faith.nd.edu/s/1210/faith/interior.aspx?sid=1210&gid=609&pgid=10751>

This daily resource is use-friendly with a link to the Scripture Reading of the Day, a relevant Prayer, a Prayer Intention, a link to the Biography of the Saint of the Day and an opportunity to give a comment on the reflection. The Comment Form States: “ Submit your comments to the FaithND team. We will be sure to forward your heartfelt messages to the author and incorporate your suggestions into future FaithND content.” It has a [Facebook Page](#).

464 people will take part in the General Assembly of the Synod that will be held at the Vatican from 4-29 October, 2023 including 365 voting members, of whom 54 are women. This includes two Bishops from the People's Republic of China. In our SCCs Poll this month one choice is: "Praying together for the Synod to take place in Rome in October, 2023." To vote go to:



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Most of the work will be done in 35 small groups, with 10 or 11 members in each group plus a facilitator, divided according to language and using the methodology of "conversation in the Spirit," characterized by "shared prayer with a view to communal discernment." There will also be plenary sessions, at which the small groups will report back to the assembly.

There will be five official language groups at the synod, but a pre-synod survey revealed that English will be the most-spoken language, followed by Italian. As a result of this, there will be 14 small groups in English, followed by eight in Italian, seven in Spanish, five in French and one in Portuguese. Documents will be produced in English and Italian.

ASIA/PHILIPPINES - The synodal path in the Philippines enhances the Basic Ecclesial Communities

Manila (Agenzia Fides) - "In the life of the Philippine Church, participation in the synodal process - with a view to the Synodal Assembly that will soon begin in the Vatican - has been wide-ranging and fruitful consultations have taken place at the grassroots level in all dioceses. One of the fundamental challenges, among those that have emerged, is the continuation and strengthening of the experience of the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BEC)," said Archbishop Emeritus Antonio Ledesma, SJ, who headed the Archdiocese of Cagayan de Oro from 2006 to 2020, in an interview with Fides. In the BEC, widespread in the Philippine Dioceses, the faithful, live the faith and Christian life in their different life situations: "Men, women, priests, religious, young people, families, are part of it, they give their witness of faith. It is an ecclesiastical synodal style experience, characterized by an inclusive and participatory character of all the members of the People of God, who contribute to pastoral and mission in accordance with the charism they have received," explains Archbishop Ledesma. The first Small Communities were established in the Philippines in the late 1960s, immediately after the Second Vatican Council, by foreign missionaries who came to the vast area of Mindanao and surrounding islands. Among the themes addressed in the pre-synodal discussions, the archbishop highlights "the active presence of the laity in communities, helping to organize pastoral life, but also to provide solidarity and support to the poorest families of a dignified life for all", while "new challenges arise from the use of new technologies and new forms of communication, which particularly affect young people".

Furthermore, said the Jesuit, "synodality is lived by our communities in a very broad sense and includes openness to the ecumenical path and interreligious dialogue, being aware that the direction of this common path is human fraternity, as indicated by Pope Francis".

During the consultations in the Philippines, three main topics were discussed: listening, proclamation and celebration. "Moments and tools for listening, appreciated by the faithful, are the pastoral visits of bishops and priests, pastoral meetings, prayer meetings, catechism and home visits, but also social media, radio and ecclesial media, all of which intend to accompany people to listen to the voice of God". With regard to proclamation, "the faithful valued and desired spaces in the life of the Catholic Church that allow them to speak openly, such as the weekly meetings of the Basic Ecclesial Communities, moments of dialogue or discussion". The celebration of the sacraments is significant for the faithful in the Philippines, especially the Eucharist, "which spiritually enlightens and nourishes and gives strength to overcome the hardships of daily life." "The sacraments," said the bishop, "awaken humility and charity and strengthen the feeling of belonging to the family of God and the desire to keep families together in the Basic Christian Communities." "I see that in my diocese, but also in many others, religious practice and popular piety are strong, Sunday and weekday masses are well attended, a sign of a faith that is still deeply rooted," notes the archbishop. All in all, said Archbishop Ledesma, the synodal journey in the Philippines took place "in a missionary spirit and with joy." "We have just celebrated 500 years since the arrival of the Gospel in our country and have become aware of the great gift that we have received. It is now up to us to pass on the gospel of love and joy to the new generations", he concludes. (PA) (Agenzia Fides, 26/9/2023)
[Fides Service] Newsletter Fides del 26-09-2023

[ASIA/PHILIPPINES - The synodal path in the Philippines enhances the Basic Ecclesial Communities - Agenzia Fides](#)

Active Catholics in the USA, some of whom belong to SCCs, are increasingly using online prayer and liturgical resources that are connected to spiritual writers (such as Father Mike Schmitz, Bishop Robert Barrons and Father Richard Rohr) and to Catholic Institutions (such as FaithND at the University of Notre Dame).

May all our SCC members pray for and with Father Anthony Makunde and Father Andrew Kaufa who are traveling from the AMECEA Office in Nairobi, Kenya to Rome this week for the world-wide Synod gathering. May the voice of the Catholic Church in Africa sound loud and clear at the gathering. It is very important that we SCC members follow the livestreaming activities and the daily internet reports of the Synod in Rome from 30 September to 29 October, 2023.

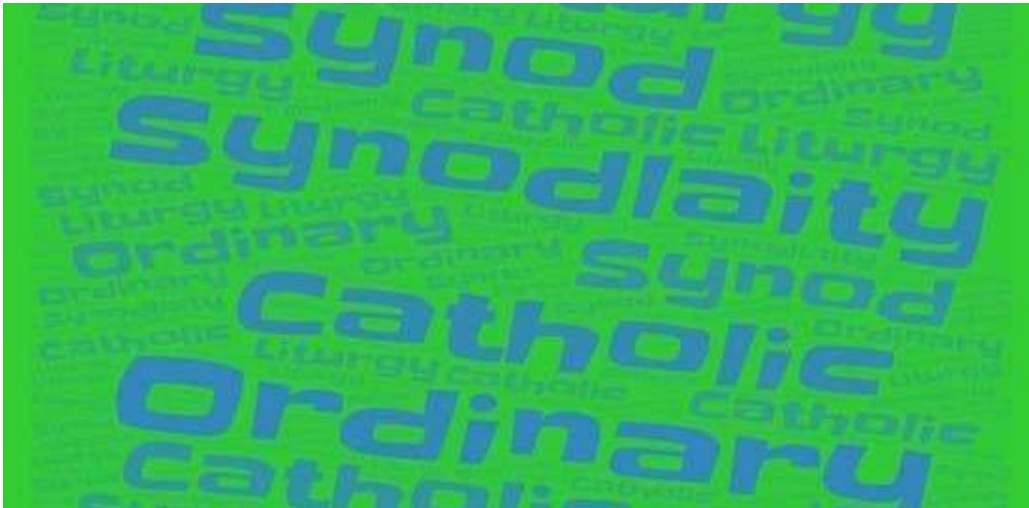
From Alloys Nyakundi: October closes the Season of Creation. It's the month of the Rosary, the month of Synod and the month of mission. Let's pray for the intervention of the Holy Spirit.

May all SCC members pray together for Pope Francis' October, 2023 prayer intention: "For the Synod." Pope Francis invites everyone to embrace listening and dialogue through the Synod. "Let us pray for the Catholic Church that she may adopt listening and dialogue as a style of life at every level, allowing herself to be guided by the Holy Spirit towards the world's peripheries." One level is SCCs.

We are challenged to grow our weekly SCC gatherings in a synodal style, in a synodal way as part of the evolving Synodal Church. This emphasizes deeper listening to each other, silence and asking what God is saying in the Scripture passages. Similarly a number of online articles suggest ways that we can celebrate mass in a more synodal (walking together) way. For example, “Synodality and Ordinary Catholics: If Synodality is about Renewal in the Holy Spirit, a Renewal of Liturgy is One of the Forms It Must Take” by Thomas O’Loughlin. 28 March, 2023. Read more at: <https://international.la-croix.com/.../synodality.../17519>

Key points:

1. Liturgy must engage people as individuals within a community.
2. Liturgy must, to be true to the fundamental insight of synodality, involve a deeper listening to the Word of God (Scripture Readings) and to one another.
3. Physical space is designed so the Word of God is shared among the gathering. The assembly is arranged so that it is a community event of listening. Solidarity can become a weekly experience. The congregation is not consuming a message being dispensed from the front of a lecture hall-style church. Putting the chairs in a rough circle allows people to feel they are a community and it helps focus people in their listening.
4. For the Eucharistic Prayer the congregation can stand around the altar. We are a celebrating community.



[INTERNATIONAL.LA-CROIX.COM](https://international.la-croix.com)

Synodality and ordinary Catholics

If synodality is about renewal in the Holy Spirit, a renewal of liturgy is one of the forms it must take.

During a pleasant lunch in New Jersey, USA Bishop Joseph Mlola, ALCP/OSS, Bishop of Kigoma Diocese in Tanzania, talked about the importance of Small Christian Communities (SCCs):

1. Their numbers are listed by parish on the:
Catholic Diocese of Kigoma, Tanzania Website
<https://kigomadiocese.org>

2. In Eastern Africa a SCC is a communion of families that are the domestic church on the local grassroots level. They are an important pastoral, ecclesial, church structure in the ongoing Synodal Process and the Synodal Church.
3. Tanzania is in the middle of celebrating the Golden Jubilee (1973 -- 2023) of SCCs in the nine AMECEA countries.
4. The SCC Model of Church in Eastern Africa is not well known in the USA. We are challenged to share books and websites on SCCs with the USA Church such as the: Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website
<https://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>



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My email message to Sarahi Unzueta:

Thanks, Sarahi.

I enjoyed your input and insights. Sharing our favorite foods was fun.

If you have read my chapter on Catholic Young Adults in the Orbis Book *God's Quad: Small Faith Communities on Campus and Beyond*, you will notice that all our Young Adult Listening Sessions on college campuses in the USA start with food. A young woman at Georgetown University gave us the mantra: *Feed them and they will come*.

I hope some American Catholic Young Adults will be regular participants in our Online Young Adults Seekers Small Christian Community Gatherings and contribute to our

Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community (Kenyatta University) Facebook Page

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/875453985953421>

Great write up, Mwanajumuiya Mary. I hope you can connect your reflections to our Young Seekers Online SCC.

Our weekly SCC Gatherings should be horizontal rather than vertical. That is, we should sit around in a circle where everyone is equal. Priests and sisters do not have priority over lay people. SCCs are the People of God walking together. In a list we put the names in alphabetical order, not in clerical, hierarchical order. We don't use special titles.

Prayers for the Synodal Process that is horizontal rather than vertical.

So many intentions for SCC members to pray for during the month of October: World Mission Month. Month of the Rosary. Synod Gathering in Rome. Care of Creation/Ecology.

May all SCC members pray together for Pope Francis' October, 2023 prayer intention: "For the Synod." Pope Francis invites everyone to embrace listening and dialogue through the Synod. "Let us pray for the Catholic Church that she may adopt listening and

dialogue as a style of life at every level, allowing herself to be guided by the Holy Spirit towards the world's peripheries." One level is SCCs.

To a question about Intentional Eucharistic Communities (IECs), I wrote:

"I put "Intentional Eucharistic Community/ies" in the Search Engine of our 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 (2012). The book is updated every month and is available as a free online digital (electronic) Ebook. 1,469 pages as of 1 October, 2023 on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at:

<http://smallchristiancommunities.org/building-the-church.../>

http://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf

On sale on Amazon (Kindle Edition and other digital formats), on Google as an Ebook and on Amazon as a Print on Demand (POD) paperback in two volumes.

and got 11 hits. We write about two main types that are outside the official Catholic Parish structure:

1. When "intentional" means living together and sharing daily life. Example: Francis House in Washington DC.
2. When "intentional" means a commitment to celebrating the Eucharist together on Sundays, to some socializing together and to regular social action outreach, but the members live separately. Examples: *Communitas* and *Nova* in the Washington DC/Virginia Area. NOTE: *Communitas* as a Case Study is written up in our Orbis Book *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*.

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smallchristiancommunities.org

Many new types of Small Christian Communities/Small Intentional Eucharistic Communities are emerging outside the Catholic parish structure around the world as they respond to the signs of the times. The Beloved Inclusive Catholic Community (BICC) is based in Urbana, Illinois, USA. A member writes: "This is a community of Roman Catholic believers dedicated to full inclusion of all who come seeking to belong, to worship, to serve and be fed. We are progressive in nature and strive to model a church that is void of the patriarchy and power dynamics that have contributed to scandal and abuse in the Roman Catholic Church. We remain firm in our baptismal rights that connect us to the larger Catholic community and strive to move the church forward in supporting the equality, dignity and worth of all God's children.

About 20 people regularly attend the Eucharistic Liturgy. Most are women -- female, white, in our 60s and 70s, well educated and post Vatican II Catholics -- who want to participate but our traditional parish has a 45 year priest trained in a conservative seminary who says mass like it was 1962 and every homily exhorts us to go to confession once a week

no matter what the scripture readings were. There is one trans woman who is in her 70s and a couple of queer women who are younger. There are very few men. Only two men attend regularly and they are in their 60s. There are no young people.

The BICC was involved in the Synodal Process. It's report was written and sent forth by our community. We want to thank everyone who participated in this event, from the planning, to the listening, speaking, and discerning, to the writing, and the receiving.”

[\(Beloved ICC Home\)](#)

The key message of the Synod on Synodality is listening, a virtue that most leaders in Kenya lack, Muheria the Catholic Archbishop of the country's Nyeri Archdiocese has said. The Kenyan Archbishop delivered his message from Rome where he is participating in the ongoing October 4-29 Synod on Synodality conversations, with October 5 as the first full day of work.

He said that the meeting of the more than 400 delegates of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome is centered on how the Catholic Church can journey together in synodality “without leaving anyone behind”, and ensuring that everyone is listened to.

The Kenyan member of Opus Dei acknowledged that the two years of the Synod on Synodality had allowed for conversations at various levels of the Church including the Small Christian Communities (SCCs), Parishes and Dioceses. With the synod on synodality, he said, the Catholic Church is finding ways to give everyone an opportunity to air their views on how to be witnesses. Archbishop Muheria expressed concern that individualism was taking the place of conversations especially in families where members are not listening to each other.

“Recently, I asked some men how many of them took more than two hours, when schools were closed for holidays, to listen to their children. Not to guide them, not to inform them, not to advise them, but to listen to them,” he said, and added, “Sadly, we have forgotten the value of conversations in our homes.” “Conversations in our families have been overtaken by mobile phones, TVs, and music; everything but listening. The man is no longer listening to his wife. The wife is no longer listening to her husband. Children don't listen to their parents and the parents no longer listen to their children,” he lamented.

Meanwhile, Archbishop Muheria has appealed for prayers for those participating in the Synod on Synodality, saying, “Pray for us so that whatever comes out of our conversations may build the Church where everyone is a witness.”

Mwanajumuiya Alphonse Omolo reminds us that Tuesday, 17 October, 2023 the 11th birthday of St. Isidore SCC. Let us harvest our memories. One year ago we wrote on our SCC Facebook Page:

We are celebrating the 10th Anniversary of our weekly St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC Gathering on Monday, 17 October, 2022. The historical note in our free, online Ebook states: “Using Skype Video Conferencing we started on Wednesday, 17 October, 2012 with one person from Kenya, one person from Germany, 13 people from the Maryknoll Lay Missioners Orientation Program at Bethany, New York, USA and four others

including several Maryknoll Sisters who served in Tanzania. Some of us were participating in a SCC Workshop at the Maryknoll Sisters Center at Maryknoll, New York, USA. The Maryknoll Society Tech person connected us with Alphonse Omolo who was studying in Germany and Rose Musimba who was living in Nairobi, Kenya through the internet.

Is Mwanajumuiya Belza baking our virtual cake????? I hope Belza Ramos will 'bake' the virtual cake. I like it fresh with the rare recipe from San Antonio.

Some responses:

- Summary: Nine members participated in our online gathering: four laywomen, three laymen, one sister, one priest.

Old words: WWW (world wide web), cyberspace

New words: internet, hybrid, online/virtual/digital, Zoom, Facebook (including Audio and Visual features), remote connectivity, Chat Room.

- From Alloys Nyakundi: "Thanks for the update and I hope this gathering brings great memories of joy and appreciation to all those who have gone out of their way to support St. Isidore SCC."
- As Alphonse and Jessica said during our online gathering we have been pathfinders in moving into a Digital World and exploring new ways of being an online SCC Model of Church.

At the Synod briefing on Wednesday, 11 October, 2023 journalists heard from Ms. Grace Wrackia from Papua New Guinea. She was a witness to the Synod Process in Oceania and made heard the voice of the Small Communities (SCs). Grace Wrackia expressed gratitude to the Pope for inviting representatives from the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea to the Synod. "For so many years we have been listening and now we'd like to speak and we'd like you to listen to our experience. We have something to give to the world. What we give from our hearts is our way of living, living in communion, living together and building relationship."

I received an email message from a reporter for the *OSV News*. *Our Sunday Visitor* (*OSV*) is a National Catholic weekly newspaper in the USA. In July 2012, *Our Sunday Visitor* was selected by the Vatican as the exclusive distributor of the North American English edition of the official Vatican newspaper, *L'Osservatore Romano*. In July 2022, *OSV* acquired the operations of *Catholic News Service (CNS)* that closed its US office at the end of 2022. *Our Sunday Visitor* launched a new wire service/online news agency on 1 January, 2023 called *OSV News*.

The reporter has been asked to do a story on Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) because some people in the USA do not seem to know what they are, and they have been mentioned at the Synod that is presently going on in Rome. This is an opportunity to share the experience and importance of Basic Christian Communities/Small Christian Communities in the Global South (Africa, Asia and Latin America). In particular we can explain the SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa (the nine AMECEA countries of Eritrea (1993), Ethiopia (1979), Kenya (1961), Malawi (1961), South Sudan (2011), Sudan (1973), Tanzania (1961), Uganda (1961) and Zambia (1961)).

This article was published as: Frazee, Barb, “Small Christian Communities, Prominent in Asia, Latin America, Seen As Model For Whole Church,” *OSV News*, 24 October, 2023, reprinted as follows:

The Record (Louisville Archdiocese)

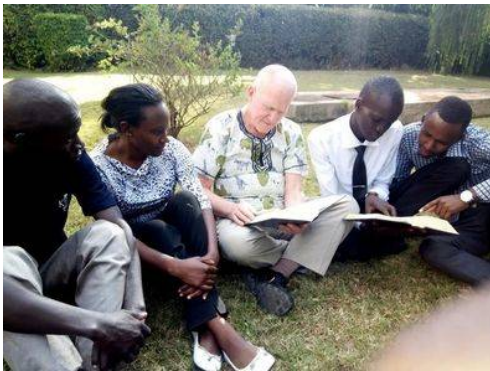
<https://www.oursundayvisitor.com/small-christian-communities-prominent-in-asia-latin-america-seen-as-model-for-whole-church/>

Small Christian Communities, prominent in Asia, Latin America, seen as model for whole church - *The Record* Newspaper
Small Christian Communities, prominent in Asia, Latin America, seen as model for whole church - *The Record* Newspaper

The article begins: "Throughout the various stages of the Synod of Bishops on synodality, several church leaders have referred to a new model of church that includes Basic Ecclesial Communities. But what exactly are those?"

The communities — often referred to as CEBs for their Spanish acronym (*Comunidades Eclesiales de Base*, also referred to as BECs) or as BCCs for Basic Christian Communities — are prominent in Asia, Latin America [and Africa]. The Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa [AMECEA] refers to them as Small Christian Communities and has made them part of the ecclesial structure of the [Catholic] Church [in Eastern Africa].

Some such communities also exist within at least four archdioceses in the United States, primarily within ministry to the Hispanic communities in Baltimore, Washington, Chicago and Los Angeles..."



[Small Christian Communities, prominent in Asia, Latin America, seen as model for whole church - The Record Newspaper](#)

General Congregation No. 4 of the Synod of Bishops
Testimony – 9 October 2023

How can we be more fully a sign and instrument of union with God and of the unity of all humanity?

By P. Clarence DAVEDASSAN (Malaysia)

In the context that we live in, the Church in Asia cannot be self-referential and, therefore, seeks to engage in renewing the world. Our union with God spurs us to be the light and salt of the earth. One way has been to build Basic Ecclesial Communities, BECs (in some places known as Small Christian Communities or Basic Human Communities). They bring about not only spiritual transformation but also social transformation. They have been the beacons of hope for gospel witnessing in society. The BECs become a leaven of Christian life, care for the poor, and commit to transforming society through a lived gospel experience. These communities demonstrate a communion that radiates to Christians and non-Christians alike. They are our visible signs of a synodal church that is relevant and, at the same time, relational.

This is a powerful statement that reflects the Asian context where BECs demonstrate a communion that radiates to Christians and those who are not Christians alike.

Michael Centore, "A Leaven for Positive Change: Synod Report for October 12, 2023" *Today's American Catholic*, 12 October, 2023.

The importance of Small Christian Communities (SCCs), also known as Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) or Basic Christian Communities (BCCs), to the life of the church has been a recurring theme of the synodal discussion this week.

[Leaven for Positive Change: Synod Report for October 12, 2023 - Today's American Catholic \(todayamericancatholic.org\)](https://www.todayamericancatholic.org/leaven-for-positive-change-synod-report-for-october-12-2023)

Press Conference at the Synod in Rome:

Archbishop Andrew Nkea Fuanya of Bamenda, Cameroon said at an 12 October 2023 briefing that the Synod on Synodality is "a chance for the voice of Africa to be heard." "Synodality forms part of the African culture," Fuanya said, "because we always do things together as a family and when we do things together as a family, we always consult everyone in the family." He described different "levels" within the Catholic community. Before the parish level, which he said can often be quite large, there is a "mission station," while below that, the Basic Christian Communities are made up of families," where everyone is able to express themselves. "Our culture helps us to be synodal," said Fuanya, one of three African bishops on the synod's Ordinary Council.

This is similar to the pastoral structure in Eastern Africa (the nine AMECEA countries). From the bottom up: family, SCC, outstation, parish.

The Synod delegates meeting in Rome are sitting in mixed round tables of 12 persons each --laymen, laywomen, religious, priests, bishops and cardinals together. This is a type of SCC.

The term "Small Christian Community" has many meanings these days. See this story:

"The future looks dark for Christians in besieged Gaza."

The future looks dark for Christians in besieged Gaza. Their presence in the Hamas-ruled Palestinian enclave steadily weakened these past 20 years, the Small Christian Community in the Gaza Strip is praying for a swift end to the conflict. "We're in mortal danger, but we help anyone who asks," says Holy Rosary Sister Nabila, who is based at Holy Family Parish in Gaza City (the only Catholic parish in Gaza). She says the Israeli air strikes that have been pounding Gaza since 7 October, 2023 hours after Hamas carried out its surprise and brutal attack on Israel, have destroyed the homes of most of the 137 Latin-rite Catholics who belong to the parish. 200 displaced persons are huddled in the parish including some Muslims. All the people have been ordered to leave and move south.

Praying for and with these 137 Latin-rite Catholics who belong to the parish. Many will probably leave Gaza given the present unrest and uncertain future. The future of Gaza's Christian Communities seems more uncertain than ever. Strained by endemic poverty and insecurity, the Arab Catholics those who once numbered over 7,000 faithful just 15 years ago are now down to 1,000 and fear being totally decimated.

Read more at:



INTERNATIONAL.LA-CROIX.COM

The future looks dark for Christians in besieged Gaza

Their presence in the Hamas-ruled Palestinian enclave steadily weakened these past 20 years.

The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) based in Washington DC, USA invited me to write the Gospel Reflection for the Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A (15 October, 2023). Here it is. The reflection will go live on the MOGC Website on Monday, 9 October, 2023. It will be sent by email to the MOGC contacts, and the Maryknoll Magazine will publish it on their website and social media by Sunday, 8 October, 2023.

Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A

Maryknoll Priest Joseph Healey, MM

Sunday, October 15, 2023

Is 25:6-10a | Phil 4:12-14, 19-20 | Mt 22:1-14

Are you following the Synod on Synodality that is taking place in Rome right now from 4 to 29 October, 2023? Some people say that it could be the most important event in the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council (1962-65).

There are many parallels between today's Gospel and the synod.

Matthew 21: 9 -10: “Go therefore to the main roads and invite to the wedding feast as many as you find.’ And those servants went out into the roads and gathered all whom they found, both bad and good. So the wedding hall was filled with guests.”

The present 2021 – 2024 Synodal Process encourages us to “enlarge the space of our tent” (*Isaiah 54:2*) so everyone can fit into the Catholic Church including the refugees, homeless, LGBTQ people, people in polygamous marriages, people with special needs and others. All are invited. We are all walking together. We are inclusive.

Pope Francis' September, 2023 prayer intention was “For people living on the margins.” The pope invited everyone to:

- Pray for and assist people living on the margins of society.
- Pay attention to people who face marginalization, even if it results from poverty, addictions, mental illness or disability. Specific examples: homeless people, street children washing car windshields, people with various disabilities.
- Offer a culture of welcoming, of providing shelter, of giving a home, of offering love, of giving human warmth.
- Help those living in subhuman living conditions.
- Welcoming is more than helping; it means putting the other person at our level.

Repitè conmigo: Todos, todos, todos [Portuguese]. “Repeat with me: Everyone, everyone, everyone.” Pope Francis proclaimed this message to 1.5 million young people at World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal this past August, 2023. He later emphasized that the Catholic Church is open to everyone including “the sick, the elderly, the young, old, ugly, beautiful, good and bad.”

More equality to women is one of the main topics being discerned at this October, 2023 Synod.

Listen to this story from Kenya called “We Women Are Equals and Have a Voice:”

Research indicates that 75% of the members of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Nairobi Archdiocese in Nairobi, Kenya are women. In interviews Catholic women have said: “In the hierarchical, clerical Catholic Church in Kenya we women feel at the bottom. We are second class. This is reinforced by our traditional African customs and traditions where we are also second class. But in our weekly SCCs when we sit around in a circle and share our reflections on the Gospel of the following Sunday we feel that we women are equals and have a voice.”

As a takeaway the next time you are in your parish or in a faith sharing group or at a community center search out a visitor or a stranger and say: “Welcome. Feel at home.” This person is Jesus in our midst.

Please share this Gospel Reflection with anyone who is interested.

We pray for the participants as the Synodal Assembly's first session got underway in Rome this week, and for the wider People of God who continue to journey along this synodal path.

Some responses:

1. From Maryknoll missionary priest Dennis Moorman who uses parts of this English reflection about synodality in his weekend homilies in Portuguese in Brazil. He took a lot of material from Pope Francis and the synod and integrated some specific things from Brazil's reality.
2. From Maryknoll missionary priest Rafael Davila in Houston, Texas, USA: "I Google translated this homily into Spanish and hope to give it at two Sunday masses. **NOTE:** This shows the great use of internet technology. Gospel Reflections in English (in this case mainly borrowed from others especially Pope Francis) can be helpful in a Spanish Homily.
3. From Charlie Gibson: "Thank you for sharing your inspiring reflections on the inclusiveness of Jesus."
4. Mary Wahome: "Thanks for the sharing. Very, very insightful.
5. Mercy Kamau: "Thank you for the sharing. Very interested and insightful."
6. From Cardinal Berhaneyesus D. Souraphiel CM in Rome: "I thank you for your reflections and for the SCCs whose fruits will be seen at the present Synod."
7. From Susan Nagele: "I am following the synod and it is a step forward. Kenyan women have a lot more patriarchy to deal with than we women in North America. Girls in Afghanistan can't go to school past 6th grade. So I consider myself very fortunate. But my local parish has gone back to pre-Vatican II practices and I am not going back there. Thanks for your reflection. There is a lot to chew on there and I look forward to doing that. Keep going!!!"
8. From a Carmelite Sister: "Nice reflection. Sunday, 15 October is also the feast of Teresa of Avila. Also it is the day in Rome when Pope Francis will announce his letter on St. Thérèse of Lisieux."
9. From Abel Nagaya: "Hello. Thanks for the updates."
10. From Leo Shea: "I read your homily on the MOGC website. Very nice reflection, Joe. Short and to the point with regard the hopes and at times promises of the Synod."
11. From Deacon Paul Bork who coordinates the Mission Appeals Program of the Maryknoll Society. He used material from the MOGC Gospel Reflection for the Twenty-eighth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A in his homily in Buffalo Diocese, New York, USA on 15 October, 2023.

From Rene Reid in Rome on 14 October, 2023: "Joan Chittister and I touched on many issues including what each of us can do to foster this synodal process – especially in places where there is resistance/denial from the bishops. Joan's suggestion was that each of us sit down with family members and/or a few friends and begin discussing what has come out of this Synod and what each of us can do to insist that synodality become part of our diocese, parish, or small communities. I intend to do this in my community when I return home and hope each of you will consider doing the same."

What can each of us do to insist/insure that synodality become part of our Small Christian Communities?

Kaufa, Andrew, "VATICAN SYNOD:: What is Unique to The Lay Out of Synod Hall?" AMECEA Online News, 6 October, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 15 October, 2023, <https://amecea.blogspot.com/.../vatican-synod-what-is...>

Speaking as an African from Eastern Africa, I can agree that this is a new grammar in so far as the synod is concerned. However, it is not a new grammar when it comes to being a church in the Eastern Africa (AMECEA) and Southern Africa (IMBISA) regions of the Church in Africa where the ecclesiology of the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) has become the way of being a church. Coincidentally, the AMECEA region is also celebrating 50 years of the SCCs. The image of a Small Christian Community is that of a community of baptized men and women, youth including the religious men and women as the priests together sharing in a set of a circle, with the Bible as the center of their spiritual conversation about their life experiences and their mission to the world around them.

From the talks at the Synod in Rome during this month of October, 2023, it is clear that the Western world does not understand the pastoral, ecclesial structure of parishes in the Global South. The descending order is:

parish
sub-parish or center.
outstation or mission station
SCC
Family

All levels are part of a Communion Ecclesiology.

Today all of us SCCs members are invited to a Global Day of Prayer: a day of fasting, abstinence and prayer for peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land on Tuesday, 17 October 2023.

The connection between SCCs and World Mission Sunday (celebrated on 22 October, 2023) can be seen in two choices in our SCC Poll:

Eighty-Seventh Round (September - October, 2023): The best part of my Small Christian Community is...

- * Center of evangelization to the family and youth.
- * Where the faithful experience and live Synodality as mission, participation and communion.

The terms mission and evangelization are closely related.

At the same time we should connect SCCs and World Mission Sunday to the ongoing Synod Gathering going on in Rome until 29 October, 2023.



ST. DOMINIC

Invites you all to
**"YOUNG LIFE AFRICA CHILDREN'S HOME
 (RUIRU) VISIT ON 28th Oct 2023."**

ACTIVITIES:

*Cleaning,
 Team building,
 Mentorship & cooking.*

DONATIONS:

*Foodstuffs,
 Stationaries & finances.*

Moderator:

Treasurer:

0712363889-Mar

*James 2:15-16,
 and daily in n
 were to say to t
 nourished" and
 are necessary*

From Alloys Nyakundi: “During the October 12 Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community and 17th October St. Isidore Skype SCC gatherings, our members from St. Dominic SCC, Kenyatta University invited us to attend and give some donations for the charity work that will take place as shown in the poster below. In the Synodal spirit, the Online Young Adult Seekers SCC has decided synodally to donate Ksh. 5,000 from the Young Seekers Fund in support of this important activity, reaching out to the marginalized in our communities. Prayers and best wishes.

From Faith Makori: ”Shalom brothers and sisters. Receive greetings from St. Dominic fraternity and Kenyatta University Catholic Community at large. We have just received your generous contribution as Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community towards the Charity event we are planning. Feel appreciated and may the Good Lord bless you all who contributed towards the contribution in one way or another. May we continue to grow together in the synodal spirit.”

From Joseph Healey: Thank you for this Synodal Spirit. One choice in our SCC Poll at <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/> is: "Pray for and assist people living on the margins of society." These children are living on the margins of society. It is wonderful that we can help them through prayer, financial assistance and foodstuffs/stationaries, etc. Plus the mentorship, cleaning, cooking and team building on the day itself.

From Mary Wahome: “We as students of KU, as members of St. Dominic SCC, we appreciate the heartfelt donation. May the good Lord continue blessing us as we are together in the spirit of synodality and as we continue sharing... Wooow, we as students of KU, and members of St. Dominic SCC, we appreciate and may God continue blessing all of us as we are all together in the spirit of synodality and the spirit of sharing.”

From Valentine Mukokho: “We are really grateful for the support 🙏🙏🙏 May God bless you.”

From Alphonse Omolo: "This is great news indeed. We thank God for its continued blessings amidst the challenges. A great opportunity for the youth indeed. Hopefully, they can work with this to the benefit of the Youth SCCS. It is difficult but a well-learned lesson."

Alloys points out: "In the Outer Life of SCCs, members learn that both the Inner and Outer lives of SCCs are vital, for example, what St. Dominic SCC is doing through reaching out to the marginalized. This is one of the many practical ways of living the gospel of Jesus Christ.

St. Dominic SCC, oyee.

At the Press Conference at the synod in Rome on 19 October, 2023 Archbishop Dabula Mpako of the Archdiocese of Pretoria, South Africa emphasized that “many African countries have a fertile ground for synodality.” He cited the history of the Small Christian Community (SCC) movement in Africa as a forerunner to the synodal method. “We are building upon an experience we have already had,” he said. Asked about the relationship between synodality and the Catholic Church hierarchy, Archbishop Dabula

Mpako said that the synod is trying to discover “how the two can work in such a way that synodality can infuse the hierarchical structure.”

This is an important statement that highlights that the SCC Model of Church has existed in Africa for a long time and is an expression/manifestation of synodality. One clarification. We do not like to use the word "movement" to describe the experience of SCCs. The Brazilian theologian Father José Marins says that Basic Ecclesial Communities/Small Christian Communities “are not a Movement in the Catholic Church, but the Church on the Move.”

General Congregation 12 of the Synod in Rome on 18 October 2023

Testimony

“TAKE OFF YOUR SHOES”

THE ASIAN JOURNEY INTO SYNODAL LEADERSHIP

Estela P. Padilla,

FABC-OTC

“Walking barefoot together, the synodal journey – from Small Communities to the parish, diocesan, national and Continental levels in Asia -- was a participatory process of being a prophetic community. In our *Final Asian Synodal Report*, we proclaimed who we are as church: reading the signs of the times and heeding the call of God to be bridges of peace and become peace builders, to continue to dialogue with the poor, religions, and cultures, to entrust the young and women with important leadership roles, and to care especially for migrants and refugees, among other things.”

As we come to the end of October, 2023 you are invited to vote in our SCC Poll at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org> You can vote many times but not more than once in a 24 hour period. This September – October, 2023 Poll has received the most votes/hits since we began – 563 votes so far. The six choices really speak to our “contemporary signs of the times.” Welcome.

<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>



SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

Small Christian Communities – Small Christian Communities

Small Christian Communities

The SCCs Poll is on the right side of the Home Page of the SCCs Website at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>

Joseph Healey: "Praying together for the Synod to take place in Rome in October, 2023." And "Praying together for the Golden Jubilee of SCCs in Eastern Africa."

Alloys Nyakundi: Yes, I encourage the young seekers to participate in this poll before the end of the month when it closes. I have been voting and still voting for: "Pray for and assist people living on the margins of society."

From *Today's American Catholic* Website: Sister Mary Theresa Barron, OLA, President of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) [Women]:

Picking up on a theme that was introduced yesterday by Archbishop Anton Dabula Mpako of South Africa, she spoke of how her experience with Small Christian Communities (SCCs) has informed her understanding of synodality. Barron's work as a missionary took her to Eastern Africa, which she called "my first introduction to a synodal church." She described a parish structure in a rural parish in Shinyanga Diocese in Tanzania that comprised 35 villages. It was half the size of Ireland. Each village had an "outstation" with a catechist. "There were only two priests to serve the entire parish," she explained. "It was such a synodal process," she said. "We listened to each other. The decisions were taken together. The outstation fed into the center, which fed into the parish, which then fed into the diocese."

Barron said that the Rome Synodal Assembly reminds her of the weekly meetings of these Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa, particularly the way that everyone is given a chance to contribute regardless of rank, position, or educational status.

"I think the experience of sitting around the tables in Paul VI Hall brings me back again to East Africa. The setting is extremely different. I imagine myself outside a mud hut where we met every Sunday for our Basic Christian Community meetings — a small gathering of people, maybe 10 families in the Christian community. We sat around and shared our faith rooted in the Gospel of that Sunday. But the key was that we had to decide how we wanted to live that faith as a community and take an action. What was beautiful for me: "We shared our faith from the depths of our hearts and we came to a decision together," she said. "Every voice was the same around that Small Christian Community."

This witness talk/testimony is a very good description of the SCCs Model of Church from the grassroots up. Communion Ecclesiology work hand in hand with synodality (walking together).

Barron is an Irish missionary sister. Her talk at the Vatican Press Conference: "A Coordination of Charisms: Synod Report for October 20, 2023. It can be found on the Vatican Website on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDv25cbXlgA>

Sister Barron is an Irish Sister of Our Lady of Africa (OLA) Congregation that is the companion congregation of the Society of the Missions in Africa (SMA) especially the priests of the Irish Province of the Society of the Missions in Africa (SMA) in Tanzania. She served as a Pastoral Worker in Mwamapalala Parish in Shinyanga Diocese from September, 1995 to April, 2001 (5 years, 8 months) and as a Project Manager in Bugisi Parish in Shinyanga Diocese from August, 2003 to August, 2004 (1 year, 1 month).

Sources of information and commentary on the Synod in Rome:

Press Conferences/Briefings
 Testimonies in Plenary Sessions
 Interventions in Plenary Sessions (Spoken and Written)
 Letters
 Interviews
 Blogs
 Reports
 Commentaries

Articles
 Stories
 Podcasts
 Video Clips
 Websites
 Facebook Pages
 Other Social Media

Happy World Mission Sunday.

During the meeting of the Executive Board members of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA held from 17-18 October, 2023 in Nairobi, Kenya the Chairman highlighted various issues of importance that the board looked at including; the Silver Jubilee celebration of Blessed Bakanja AMECEA College which is a regional seminary owned by AMECEA, the Golden Jubilee of the establishment of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the region, and the need to have policies for child safeguarding and for vulnerable adults: the elderly, the sick the poor who are at times not given a platform.

A good topic for discernment and decision-making in our SCCs. What are we going to do:

Tracey Horan, *NCR*: “As I have watched the unfolding Synod on Synodality in Rome, I keep thinking about the power of the collective. We, as followers of a God so often made manifest through collective liberation, don't have to wait for top-down change. In the words of Spanish poet Antonio Machado, "se hace camino al andar" [a Spanish proverb or saying]— "you make the path by walking it." This synodal process is a path that we are all making.

At the end of the Angelus Pope Francis reminded the faithful that next Friday, 27 October 27, 2023 will be a day of prayer and fasting and there will be an hourlong prayer vigil held in St. Peter's Square to pray for peace in the world. The vigil will start at 6 p.m. Rome time. Let us pray for peace in all our SCC gatherings.

Tom Reese writes in *Religious News Service* (23 October, 2023).

As a result, no document will convey the result of the synod. It will not be enough to read any document that comes from the synod; Catholics must experience the synod, must do synod. The best place to do this is in your parish. Some of the African participants at the synod report that they are already doing it. They have Small Christian Communities that meet weekly to converse about the Sunday Scriptures. They pray together and share their reflections. This provides the groundwork for a Synodal Parish. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Vienna, Austria acknowledged that the European Church is lagging behind on such practices. Every parish in America can have its own synodal experience by adapting the synodal process as described in “Methodology for the working groups,” published by the General Secretary of the synod.

“Pope Francis wants the synod in every parish. Here’s how to bring it to yours.”
[Pope Francis wants the synod in every parish. Here’s how to bring it to yours. | America Magazine](#)

This article is particularly good for imaging what the future parish may look like.

From the Today's American Catholic Website: Article on "The Synod on Synodality: Evolution or Revolution?" by Gene Ciarlo (October 23, 2023)

"Small Christian Communities are gathering as we speak. It is becoming increasingly common for like-minded Roman Catholic Christians and other Christians to come together on a regular basis to pray, break bread, and perhaps celebrate Eucharist. They may not all profess Roman Catholicism, but they confess Jesus, the Christ, as Lord, and are believers in his message, method, and style of life, love and compassion. They are an open and welcoming community, accepting among them anybody who believes in Jesus, acknowledging him as the Word and affirming his lifestyle as answering the needs of their own journey.

The aim of these Small Communities is to carry forward into their members' lives the unity, simplicity, compassion, and bonding of their gathering as church. The underlying theme of their coming together is how to grow to be able to reach out, to evangelize by word and deed in daily life. The community is never myopic and self-serving. It is intended to build *ekklesia*, "the gathering of those summoned."

Young Seekers: An Informal Conversation with an International Small Christian Community Based in Kenya led by Alloys Nyakundi from Kenya with Kristiana Aurel from Indonesia, James Mhangwa from Tanzania, Ashknaz Khokhar from Pakistan, Collins Ongoma from Kenya, Alexandro Rolandi from Indonesia and Mary Wahome from Kenya. Spirit Unbounded Video Clip, Spirit Unbounded YouTube, 22:06 minutes (from 1:14:57 to 1:37:03). 3 3 Ways of Being Church - Different Rhythms - YouTube and https://youtu.be/T74SFrUo7PY?si=xklvTRoqrM_67c45

In a conversation with Maggi Conway members of the Online Young Seekers Small Christian Community describe their online SCC. These are 20 young adults (women and men) from four countries (Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan and Tanzania) who meet online every two weeks. See Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community (Kenyatta University) Facebook Page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/875453985953421>



Fraze, Barb, “Is the Priest Listening To You? Indian Diocese Surveys Families for Synod,” *Central Minnesota Catholic – Magazine of the Diocese of St. Cloud*, *OSV News Focus on Faith*, Synod 2021–2024, 17 March 2023, Central Minnesota Catholic Website. <https://thecentralminnesotacatholic.org/is-the-priest...>

ALAPPUZHA, India. An Indian diocese used its existing Small Christian Communities to train lay leaders to reach out to a wide variety of Catholics — including broken families — ensuring that everyone had a voice in the listening process for the upcoming Synod of Bishops on synodality. Some participants said they already have seen changes. Almost 70% of parishes completed the initial reflection within three days, said Msgr. Joy Puthenveetil, vicar general of the Diocese of Alleppey. “We have tried to let every family have the experience of the synod,” he told *OSV News* in early March. “The process of listening is what is important for the synodal church.” The Diocese of Alleppey has about 1,200 Small Christian Communities, and leaders of those communities trained about 70 members of the Diocesan Synod Team.



As a follow up to the Synod Gathering in Rome that ends on 29 October, 2023, we SCC members can ask: how can SCCs contribute to developing a Synodal Parish in a Synodal Diocese in a Synodal Church?

Onyalla, Don Bosco, “Synod: Church in Africa Called to “Theological, Pastoral Discernment on Polygamy Issue, "ACI Africa," 28 October 2023. (aciafrica.org)

Under “Matters for Consideration” under the topic “For a church that listens and accompanies”, the synod delegates encourage the People of God across the globe to enhance Small Christian Communities (SCCs), a new way of being Church that the leadership of the Church in Africa has included in its evangelization structures. “Widespread in many parts of the world, grassroots or Small Christian Communities foster listening practices of and among the baptized,” the synod delegates say in their 42-page document, adding, “We are called to enhance their potential, including exploring how they can be adapted to urban contexts.”

In Eastern Africa the Catholic Church has fostered SCCs for five decades. In August, 2023 the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) launched the Golden Jubilee Year of SCCs to assess the status of this new way of being church in the region. “By December 2023, it will be 50 years since the Small Christian Communities were adopted by the AMECEA Region as a pastoral priority,” Bishop Rogatus Kimaryo of Tanzania’s Same Diocese and Chairman for AMECEA Pastoral Department said in his key address during the launch that was held in Malawi’s Dedza Diocese. Bishop Kimaryo added that the Pastoral Departments of Bishops’ Conferences in the AMECEA region will be spearheading the yearlong Golden Jubilee celebrations, “not as an event, but a process comprising of several strategic activities involving all AMECEA Member Conferences.”

Under “Matters for Consideration” under the topic “Participating Bodies” the synod delegates also address the reality of SCCs. Referring to this new way of being church in Africa, the synod delegates say, “Synodality grows in the involvement of each member in processes of discernment and decision-making for the mission of the Church: in this sense we are edified and encouraged by many Small Christian Communities in emerging churches, which live a daily fraternal "body to body" around the Word and the Eucharist.”

Still under the topic of “a church that listens and accompanies”, the synod delegates pose the question of what needs to “change so that those who feel excluded can experience a more welcoming church” and go on to affirm, “Listening and accompaniment are not just individual initiatives, but a form of ecclesial action. This is why they must find a place within the ordinary

pastoral planning and operational structuring of Christian Communities at different levels, also valuing spiritual accompaniment.”

It is significant that this is the first international document in the 2021 -- 2024 Synodal Process that specifically refers to the term "Small Christian Communities" and praises their importance in the Global South.

Archbishop Andrew Fuanya Nkea of Bamenda Archdiocese in Cameroon told the *National Catholic Register* (the *Register*), ACI Africa’s partner agency, that the 4-29 October 2023 XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops “went very well, much better than I expected.” This is part of a 28 October 2023 interview with the *Register* in Rome:

“What do you think was the African Bishops’ general and most important contribution to the Synod?”

“One of the biggest contributions that Africa brought to this synod is the idea of Small Christian Communities. If we don’t go back to Small Christian Communities, all this about broad-based consultation, getting everybody involved, is a pipe dream. When you are looking at those Small Christian Communities, you’re looking at families and no one is left behind. That’s why Africa opted for the image of Church as a family, not a tent. I think this is something you see. At the end of this meeting, nobody talked about a tent anymore. We’re all about family. This is one of the big things that Africa brought on board, that is, the Church is the family of God.”

Since we began the SCCs Poll, the highest vote getters have been:

Peer group Small Faith-sharing Community. 486 (high number resulted from Chinese hacking)

Praying together for the Synod to take place in Rome in October, 2023. 174

Praying together for peace in the world. 170

Helps the needy during Covid-19 and Online faith sharing. 167.

Richness of small community Gospel reflection and faith sharing. 166

Communal listening to the Word of God. 157

Helps deepen our personal relationship with Jesus Christ and Special prayers for people with Covid-19. 153

Concerned about the COVID-19 pandemic and Sharing daily experiences. 153

Good insight into what people like. Shows the priorities of our SCC members.

The unofficial English translation of the 42 page text of the

Summary Report of the First Session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops is called "A Synodal Church in Mission" that was published in Italian on 28 October, 2023.

ANNOUNCEMENT:

It is important that we continue to evaluate our SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa so we can make it better. Please vote in the current polls.

Eighty-eighth Round -- The best part of my Small Christian Community is.....:
(November -- December, 2023):

1. Praying together for peace in war-torn areas.
2. Mirror the ongoing Synodal Process to ensure that no one is left behind.
3. Christ-centered Small Community.
4. Synodal SCCs Model of Church on the local level.
5. Everyone is given a chance to contribute regardless of rank, position or educational status.
6. Small Christian Support Community in our daily lives.

Vote at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org>



Each choice comes from the grassroots experience of SCC members and their reading the contemporary "Signs of the Times." You can vote often, but not more than once in a 24 hour period.

I voted for: "Mirror the ongoing Synodal Process to ensure that no one is left behind." Others voted for "Praying together for peace in war-torn areas" that leads with 42 votes.

"One Year after Meeting with Pope Francis, Young Africans Celebrate Growth"
by Agnes Aineah
Nairobi, 1 November, 2023, ACI Africa

Small Christian Communities: Youth meet in their Small Christian Communities (SCCs) to reflect on the word of God. SCCs (a new way of being Church have been embraced by) the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa where they have taken root. Today, our young people are making SCCs a continental initiative.



A SYNODAL CHURCH IN MISSION

SYNTHESIS REPORT OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE XVI GENERAL ORDINARY ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS



1. Synodality: Experience and Understanding
2. Gathered and Sent by the Trinity
3. Entering the Community of Faith: Christian Initiation
4. People in Poverty, Protagonists of the Church's Journey
5. A Church "Out of every tribe, tongue, people and nation"
6. The Eastern Christian Traditions and the Latin Tradition
7. On the Road Towards Christian Unity

THE FACE OF THE SYNODAL CHURCH

8. Church is Mission
9. Women in the Life and Mission of the Church
10. Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements: a Charismatic Sign
11. Deacons and Priests in a Synodal Church
12. The Bishop in Ecclesial Communion
13. The Bishop of Rome in the College of Bishops

ALL DISCIPLES, ALL MISSIONARIES

14. A Synodal Approach to Formation
15. Ecclesial Discernment and Open Questions
16. Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church
17. Mission in the Digital Environment
18. Structures for Participation
19. Groupings of Churches within the Communion of the Whole Church
20. The Synod of Bishops and Ecclesial Assemblies

WEAVING BONDS, BUILDING COMMUNITIES

EACH CHAPTER

CONVERGENCES

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION

PROPOSALS



The Universal Church expects a spiritual and missionary revival in all aspects, Archbishop Andrew Fuanya Nkea of Bamenda Archdiocese in Cameroon who participated in the October 4-29 XVI Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome said.

In a Wednesday, November 1, 2023 interview with ACI Africa, Archbishop Nkea said the synod in Rome had been “a wonderful experience of faith and intimate communion with the universal Church.” Reflecting on Africa’s participation at the synod, Archbishop Nkea said delegates from the continent “made some remarkable contributions.”

He especially highlighted what he described as “the practical idea” of the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and “the bottom-up approach” to decision making processes in the Church in Africa, saying, “In those SCCs, the Church is family and we refer to them as the Church in the neighborhood, everybody knows everybody and they work together.”

SCCs as "the Church in the neighborhood" makes the African SCCs different from SCCs in the West.

Pedro Pierre, “CEBs in the Synthesis Document,” unpublished document, Basic Ecclesial Communities, Guayaquil, Ecuador, November 2023.

The Synthesis Document of the recent Synodal Assembly meeting in the Vatican in October, 2023 makes us see that yes, the CEBs (*Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* in Spanish) are “a seed” that has become “a big bush.” This article documents the references directly and indirectly to CEBs in the Synthesis Document. The CEBs that the Ecclesial Assembly of Latin America and the Caribbean held in Mexico in 2021 described as a "synodal Church experience" have a particular responsibility in this Synodal Process to set in motion another way of being church as we have begun to be. The article suggests reflections and questions to work on in our CEBs.

From the Washington DC Archdiocese, USA Website: "Small Groups (the name for SCCs in the USA) come in all shapes but in small sizes of around 5-10 people. Your group can be a Bible Study, Book Club, Running Group, etc. Every small group includes hospitality, prayer, and discussion to help all participants make friends, make disciples, and make a difference. Groups run on a semester schedule for around 5 to 10 gatherings."

New Article Announcement: “*Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEBs) in the 2023 Synod Synthesis Document” (English Translation)

By Pedro Pierre

Basic Ecclesial Communities, Guayaquil, Ecuador. November 2023.

The Synthesis Document of the recent “Synodal Assembly” meeting in the Vatican in October, 2023 makes us see that yes, the *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEBs) are “a seed” that has become “a big bush.” With us and many other like-minded groups, Synodality is here to stay.....Read More



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**Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (CEBs) in the 2023 Synod Synthesis Document[1]
(English Translation) – Small Christian Communities**
Small Christian Communities

<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/comunidades-eclesiales-de-base-cebs-in-the-2023-synod-synthesis-document1-english-translation>

Under Latin America there are articles from eight countries:

Argentina
Bolivia
Brazil
Ecuador
El Salvador
Honduras
Peru
Venezuela

How do we connect the Gospel of next Sunday (12 November, 2023 – 32nd Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A: *Matthew 25:1-13*) to our daily life? A parish priest in Paterson Diocese, New Jersey, USA writes: “I just read the *Our Sunday Visitor* article on Small Christian Communities. What a joy and encouragement to see the African SCCs highlighted. This is the hope of the church. Engagement in SCCs is akin to the Wise Virgins being ready for the open doors to the banquet – the new banquet of the Synodal Catholic Church alive in Christ.”

Tom Reese writes in *RNS*: At the Synod on Synodality, the Western media focused on a limited number of hot-button issues — women’s ordination, married priests and blessing of gay couples. But hidden in the synod participants’ 40-page synthesis are some surprising gems that could lead to significant reform in the Catholic Church. The 15th Gem is: “The synod wants to promote Small Christian Communities who live the closeness of the day-to-day, around the Word of God and the Eucharist and by their nature foster a synodal style. “We are called to enhance their potential,” the synod’s members said.

SCCs come in many shapes and sizes. Patricia Gemmell writes from Australia that she is the coordinator of her parish Laudato Si’ Action Platform Group that has been meeting monthly for two years now. “To to my surprise and delight we have become a Small Christian Community. With their support I may be able to expand awareness of synodality in my parish.” Applying specific criteria will determine if it is a SCC (strictly speaking or in a flexible way) or a Small Group.

After the First Session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops finished in Rome in October, 2023, we are now analyzing and commenting on the 42 page text of the “Summary Report” of the First Session is called “A Synodal Church in Mission.”

The specific term “Small Christian Communities” is mentioned twice in Part III: “Weaving Bonds, Building Community.”

No. 16 is “Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church.” Under “Matters for Consideration” m) states: “Widespread in many parts of the world, grassroots [base] or Small

Christian Communities foster listening practices of and among the baptized. We are called to enhance their potential, in particular by exploring how they can be adapted to urban contexts.”

No. 18 is "Structures for Participation." Under "Matters for Consideration" e) states:

"We are encouraged by Small Christian Communities in the Emerging Churches who live the closeness of the day-to-day around the Word of God and the Eucharist.”

This is a beautiful statement but is it true regarding the reference to the Eucharist? It does not take into account what is called the Eucharistic Famine or the Eucharistic Hunger or the Eucharistic Drought especially in the Global South. Research show that due to the lack of male, celibate priests, on any given Sunday most Catholics in Africa (up to 60% in some surveys) participate in a “Sunday Service Without a Priest” where there is usually no Holy Communion especially in rural areas rather than participate in a regular mass. Bishop Patrick Kalilombe of Malawi talks about the importance of SCCs being Eucharistic Communities, but in fact they are not especially in rural areas in Africa. Research in the Amazon indicates that there are rural Catholic communities (what we call outstations or mission stations in Africa) that only get Mass once or twice a year. Pope Francis has spoken about this pastoral challenge several times.

Tom Reese points out 15 gems in the document including the one above and writes: “You will not find these gems written about in the media.” I think this is changing. I was interviewed by a reporter for *Our Sunday Visitor* about SCCs in Africa. I have seen the article reprinted in at least 10 diocesan newspapers in the USA.

Arnaud Join-Lambert writes from Belgium: "I also hope that the Synodal Process will contribute to the transformation of the Catholic Church to proclaim the Gospel in today's world."

An ongoing book is *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 (2012). The book is updated every month and is available as a free online digital (electronic) Ebook. 1,579 pages as of 26 December, 2023 on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at:

<http://smallchristiancommunities.org/building-the-church.../>
http://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf

On sale on Amazon (Kindle Edition and other digital formats) and Google as an Ebook and on Amazon as a Print on Demand (POD) paperback in two volumes.

1,500 pages in two printed volumes. Wow. This is quite a record of the amazing history of SCCs in Eastern Africa. Coincides with the Golden Jubilee (1973--2023) of SCCs in the AMECEA Region.

Patricia Gemmell describes her parish Laudato Si’ Action Platform Group in Australia: "I suppose that my group does not fit entirely into the African definition, but it might, one day! We are always evolving. The LSAP group numbers around 10, and largely overlaps with our Lenten group that has been meeting weekly in Lent for nine years now. It also largely overlaps with the group that met for months during Covid on Zoom (which my husband and I organized) and THAT was weekly Lectionary-based faith sharing.

Our monthly LSAP groups begin with silent reflection and faith sharing, usually on a *Laudato Si'* text," and I try to make our meetings as synodal as possible. In the first year (2022) we worked through a parish audit and then discerned a modest plan of action. This year, 2023, we have been implementing some of the goals. It's interesting, you know, this year is the first year that we have done some practical action and outreach, and I think that this has bonded us much closer together. The actions are small -- one hour, monthly cleanups of the streets around a church, producing an electronic newsletter, screening a documentary on Pope Francis and *Laudato Si'*, weekly prayer sessions offered to the parish before an important referendum - but I have the feeling they have significantly changed us. I think this group has the potential to become a weekly faith sharing group, but not yet. That's because I and/or my husband would have to run it, and we are both too busy!! However, it is something that I do definitely aspire to.

As I read your report on overlapping small communities I think of the "both ... and" principle. The key for us now is to do everything in a synodal way as you are doing. I call this developing Synodal SCCs in a Synodal Parish in a Synodal Diocese in a Synodal Catholic Church. I feel that many SCCs of the future will be hybrid.

ZAMBIA: "Bishops Conference Launches Small Christian Communities Jubilee Celebrations"

By Father Winfield Kunda

The Catholic Church in Zambia has launched the celebrations of the Golden Jubilee of Small Christian Communities of AMECEA. The celebration which was to start in July this year to July 2024 will now be celebrated in various forms marked with several activities in all the Catholic Dioceses in Zambia. Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops President Archbishop Ignatius Chama has thanked God, and the Founding Bishops for initiating the establishment Small Christian Communities as the new way of evangelisation. "We thank God for 50 years of fruitful experiences of Small Christian Communities as a way of being a Church, and the Founding Bishops who started the Small Christian Communities as a pastoral model that was going to bring the Good News to the people and more into the Catholic Church, the family of God. In other words, they prophetically prepared for a Synodal Church," Archbishop Chama said...

This article has three insights/challenges:

1. Use of the term Synodal Church.
2. Danger of reducing Small Christian Communities to social fundraising groups.
3. Absence of men.

Bishop Charles Kasonde writes: "Yes the launch is very important so that we allow ourselves to reflect on this important state of being the Local Church in the neighborhood." Yes, this distinguishes the SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa from the models in Europe and North America where the SCCs are not a communion/network in the physical neighborhood but scattered around. African theologians such as Father Agbonkhanmeghe Orobator, SJ have written about "SCCs as the Church in the Neighborhood."

From *Today's American Catholic*: "A Need for Creativity: Synod Report for October 29, 2023:" "The report makes a reference to Small Christian Communities when it states that reflection is urged "on the phenomenon of 'non-denominational' communities and Christian-

inspired ‘revival’ movements, which are also joined in large numbers by faithful who were originally Catholic.”

It may be that these Small Communities offer the freedom necessary to experiment with new forms of liturgical language and ministry that can then be assimilated into the synodal church. The way that Small Christian Community participants share facilitation duties amongst themselves, for instance, is just one example of how these communities foster a sense of co-responsibility that is at the heart of the synodal mission."

Please pray for the meeting of: “Pan African Committee for Social Communications (CEPACS) at 50: Towards Promoting a Synodal Church in Africa through Social Communications.” Lagos, Nigeria, 18-21 November, 2023. CEPACS is African Region’s arm of the Catholic Church that handles all matters concerning the activities in the realm of media in Africa and Madagascar -- press, radio, television, video, traditional, social media, internet and a host of other new forms of media.

Young Seekers are very committed to addressing the social injustices and environmental injustices in their different communities. So far eight young seekers have identified the issues they’ll want to start addressing going forward, for example:

1. Child neglect
2. Female genital mutilation
3. Water pollution
4. Hunting wild animals
5. Deforestation/Planting trees.
6. Gender discrimination
7. Improper disposal of plastics
8. Racial discrimination
9. LGBTQ discrimination
10. Ageism

The Young Seekers fund will be used to support some of these projects the young people want to undertake to create awareness and also try to find solutions to some of these challenges.

“Passion is the fuel that drives us forward. We aspire to be part of something bigger than ourselves. We are doing this to make the world a better place for everyone and all generations to come. That's the true spirit of Small Christian Communities.”

Small Christian Community members have to adapt to the changing meaning of words according to the local context. For almost 100 years we used "See, Judge and Act" as a Reflection Method or Process. Then "Judge" started taking on a negative, even prejorative meaning such as as making a judgement on a person or situation. Now we use "See, Discern and Act" where "Discern" has a deeper meaning.

“I am optimistic that the SCCs Golden Jubilee Celebrations in Eastern Africa and the ongoing Synodal Process will go from strength to strength in 2024.”

As we come to the end of the Liturgical Year A in the Catholic Church, we can evaluate and assess our Small Christian Communities. Are we developing and promoting Synodal SCCs in a Synodal Parish in a Synodal Diocese in a Synodal Catholic Church? Are we developing and promoting Synodal Young Adult SCCs in our Synodal Campus Ministry Centers on our college campuses?

We are delighted to announce that Father Vincent Fredrick Mwachwawa has been appointed the Auxiliary Bishop of Lilongwe Archdiocese in Malawi. Congratulations and prayers. He has long been a supporter and promoter of Small Christian Communities. In 2012 he wrote an important CUEA Master's Thesis called: "Improving Participation of the Laity in Small Christian Communities: a Pastoral Challenge in the Archdiocese of Lilongwe, Malawi." It can be found as free, online ebook on the SCCs Website at:



SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

Improving participation of the laity in Small Christian Communities: a pastoral challenge in the archdiocese of Lilongwe, Malawi.

<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/improving-participation-of-the-laity-in-small-christian-communities-a-pastoral-challenge-in-the-archdiocese-of-lilongwe-malawi/>

How can we be Synodal SCCs? How can we act in a synodal way (walking together)? Here is an example. Part of the Synodal Process is deeper listening to other people and their views, not just pushing our own ideas and views. On our weekly St. Isidore of Seville International Online Skype SCC Zoom Call today 21 November, 2023 we reflected on the Gospel of St. Matthew 25: 31-46. This is the gospel for Christ the King Sunday, the end of the Liturgical Year A in the Catholic Church (26 November, 2023). Alloys Nyakundi reflected on his mantra: "Amen, I say to you, what you did not do for one of these least ones, you did not do for me." Following him I changed my reflection and tried to apply the Gospel to the war in Gaza right now. Jesus says: "I was in prison and you visited me." The Israel hostages guarded by the Hamas terrorists in underground tunnels likely underneath hospitals in Gaza are like prisoners. Some of them are ill, hungry, thirsty, without sufficient clothes. We can be in solidarity with them and pray for their release.

From Alloys Nyakundi: "The Gospel is reminding us to think about the marginalized and those who are suffering because it's through that we serve God. It's not only about going to church on Sunday but the real church is in serving the marginalized in society. I connect the gospel to the African proverb, *A home that welcomes strangers will never lack food.*" This African Proverb has a deep meaning and important application.

Here is part of a brilliant article on SCCs by a national syndicated Catholic writer in the USA:

Lucia Silecchia, "Welcome Home, World Youth Day Pilgrims," *The Beacon* (Paterson Diocese, New Jersey, USA), 10 August 2023. Also in *Jersey Catholic*, the official online news site of the [Archdiocese of Newark](#), NJ, 7 August, 2023, [Now that you are back, where will WTD take you? – Jersey Catholic](#)

This is an excerpt in an article in the form of an "Open Letter to Young People" returning to the USA from Portugal in August, 2023 after the World Youth Day.

“Remember and appreciate the importance of companionship on the journey of faith. Do all you can to **gather, grow** and **nourish** a Small Community of Faith (SCF)). Whether it is a:

- Campus Ministry Group
- Parish Youth Group
- Group of Catholic Young Adults (including Alumni SCCs)
- Rookie parents
 - Newlyweds
- Group of devoted friends and neighbors (similar to a Small Neighborhood Community called the Church in the Neighborhood or a Neighborhood Church)

Find a community who will support you, and who you will support, as you grow in faith.

This article describes very well the many types of Youth, Young People, Young Adults and Young Professional SCCs in Eastern Africa. It points to one of the choices in our SCCs Poll this month: "Small Christian Support Community in our daily lives."

Yesterday we had a two hour Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI) online Synodal Process gathering. 75 participated. There were five people in our Small Breakout Group No. 8 (three women and two men; four continents represented – Africa, India, Philippines, USA). Highlight: The women from India and Philippines gave strong case studies of women speaking out in civil society about discrimination against women. I responded to a woman from St. Paul, Minnesota who emphasized that “group effort enlarges our voice” by describing our SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa. I told the story "We Women Are Equals and Have a Voice" <https://afriprov.tangaza.ac.ke/.../we-women-are-equals.../>

As part of my ongoing research in the USA, “Small Groups” remains the most popular term for what we call in Eastern Africa "Small Christian Communities." Other names mentioned in the online conversation or in the Chat Room were (alphabetically):

Little Groups
 Quest Groups
 Small Activist Groups
 Small Christian Communities
 Small Church Communities
 Small Communities
 Small Faith Communities
 Small Faith Sharing Groups
 Small Groups
 Small Groups of Loving People

Plus emphasis on Small Community Formation Programs.

I continue to do careful and depth research on the term “Small Christian Communities" in relation to the ongoing 2021--2024 Synodal Process. Why did it suddenly

appear twice in the 2023 "Synthesis Report?" Previously Synod documents only referred to "Small Groups" in more general terms. The term "Base Communities" has a longer history coming out of the Latin American experience. Most of the interventions at the October, 2023 Session I came from the Global South. How influential have been the Press Conferences and talks of Archbishop Andrew Nkea Fuanya of Bamenda in Cameroon?

Suggestions from Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI) --

<https://catholicchurchreformintl.org/> on "How to begin your own synodal gathering:"
<https://catholicchurchreformintl.org/start-a-synodal.../>

1. Reach out to a community of friends or members of your parish or in your local community. It can be a small community, as few as three or four, ideally no larger than 10 or 12 people.
2. You are encouraged to invite a broad spectrum of participants – active members in the church, people who have dropped out, even members of other religious affiliations. If your small community is larger than 10-12 persons, you might want to break into sub-groups/communities.
3. By way of preparation, we encourage you to read "What Is the Synod on Synodality?" – Catholic Church Reform International
<https://catholicchurchreformintl.org/> to learn what has already been completed.
4. Gather your community together for the purpose of (1) familiarizing yourselves with what the synod is and (2) preparing to submit your reflections on what you'd like to see included and/or further emphasized in Session Two of the Synod to be held in October, 2024. What reforms are needed to transform the Catholic Church into the kind of community in which you would want to be involved. You may choose to come together either in person, online via Zoom or hybrid.
5. Always open with a prayer and allow time for several minutes of silent reflection.
6. Ask someone to be the scribe to summarize in writing the stories and examples shared and the recommendations of how the situation could have been better handled by the church.
7. After introductions, you might invite them to share one facet of Catholicism so meaningful to them that they would want to preserve that, no matter what. Next, ask if they have ever been hurt in their life in the church. Allow time for silent reflection before responding.
8. As your gatherings continue, welcome anyone who wishes to share his/her own personal real-life experience of life in the church; listen to everyone with equal attentiveness.
9. Invite them to share their views of these experiences and, if they were not dealt with as Jesus would have done, offer solutions to how the situation could have been better handled. In this way, you're laying the groundwork for the church you'd like to see in the future.
10. Set up a regular meeting schedule for your small community.
11. At the appropriate time, you'll be invited to send a compilation of your responses and comments to:
info@CatholicChurchReform.com
 where we will gather all the responses and forward them to the Synod Office in Rome.
12. Feel free to continue your gatherings on into the future.

We invite you to join a CCRI online gathering. The very best experience is participating in a small gathering of your own. If you are unable to join or start a synod in your own region, we'll post a central calendar offering a series of ongoing online gatherings to accommodate the various time zones globally. You will be invited to register for the one that best fits your schedule.

Feel free to pass on this invitation to others and invite them to join us, to share their stories of life in the Catholic Church, and to become involved in preparing for Session Two of the Synod to be held in Rome in October 2024.



CATHOLICCHURCHREFORMINTL.ORG

Start a synodal gathering in your region - Catholic Church Reform International

There are many types of Listening Sessions in the Synodal Process. The two keys are fixed periods of silence to listen more deeply to the Holy Spirit and deeper listening and openness to the views of others. These steps have to be carefully followed in a synodal style. Otherwise the session becomes a typical Small Discussion Group.

The uniqueness of these steps is the statement: "You are encouraged to invite a broad spectrum of participants – active members in the church, people who have dropped out, even members of other religious affiliations." This is related to two choices in our SCCs Poll: "Everyone is given a chance to contribute regardless of rank, position or educational status." "Mirror the ongoing Synodal Process to ensure that no one is left behind."

Mwanajumuiya Cletus Majani broadcast a program on Radio Maria in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania:

"Celebrating the Golden Jubilee Year of Small Christian Communities (SCCs): 50 Years (1973 to 2023) from July, 2023 to July, 2024"

He emphasized that SCCs are not a program or a project in the parish, school or institution/organization, but a way of life. SCC members pray together, reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday together, support each other *kijumuiya* or *kisinodi* and reach out to the poor and needy together. We are promoting the growth of SCCs during this 2021-2024 Synodal Process especially during the next 10 months before the Second Assembly of the Synod in Rome in October, 2024.

As we reflect on Synodality meaning "Walking Together" I am reminded of the video made on me in 2004:

Walking [Together] with the Eastern African Church in Mission. Nairobi: Ukweli Video Productions, 2004. A video of the life and missionary ministry of Maryknoll priest Father Joseph Healey.

When Ukweli Video in Nairobi, Kenya produced a DVD in 2004 on my missionary ministry in Eastern Africa from 1968 to 2004 called *Walking [Together] with the Eastern African Church in Mission*, I used the Gospel text – *Mark 1:38*: “Jesus said to them, ‘Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also; for this purpose have I come.’” that is very similar to *Luke 4:43*: “Jesus said to them, ‘I must proclaim the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other towns also, because for this purpose I was sent/have been sent.’” -- to trace a visual chronological line on a map of East Africa of my missionary journeys or travels to other towns and places in Kenya and Tanzania: Starting in Nairobi, Kenya and traveling to Rulenge, Tanzania to Iramba, Tanzania to Makoko, Tanzania to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

There is a section in the video on my ministry with Small Christian Communities (SCCs).

During the Buzz Groups Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection on this passage in our SCCs Class at Tangaza University College on 5 February, 2015 I connected this passage to our daily lives and mentioned the internet towns that are not geographical but situational. I used this passage in my homily at my 50th Anniversary of Maryknoll Missionary Priesthood (Golden Jubilee) Mass at the Maryknoll Society House in Nairobi on 14 January, 2016. I shared that the new “town or place” for me is not a physical or geographical place, but a virtual or existential or situational place --the internet, social media and social networking. So mission for me means going to the “towns” of Facebook, Zoom, Skype, YouTube, WhatsApp and Instagram. I mentioned that I meet and interact with Kenyan young people not outside the church after the Sunday Mass, but on the social media on the internet.

People ask about the different types or styles of homilies. There are three main types:

- Traditional Preached Homilies.
- Dialog homilies.
- Shared homilies. Also called Participatory Homilies. All the SCC members together in a circle or SCC members sit two by two and share their reflections with each other (in the style of buzz groups). Can use the Synodal Process.

Then there are the different settings/places:

- Regular permanent church.
- Small outstation chapel or mission station.
- Small Christian Community (usually in the home of members).

From Mary Wahome: “And I think the ones that are enjoyable are the shared homilies, at least everyone's opinions and views are heard. Under settings, the Small Christian Community gathering (usually in the home of members) at least is a change of environment away from the regular permanent church.”

From Collins Ongoma: “This is very informative, thanks.”

People keep asking how does the Synodal Process work. These steps can be used in many different situations: a weekly SCCs Bible Reflection gathering, a SCCs workshop or seminar; a SCC Retreat.

Seven Steps in a Synodal Process Gathering

One hour if there are ten participants. **NOTE:** If participants share for less than three minutes/two minutes each, the total time will be less.

1. Opening Prayer: “We stand before you, Holy Spirit.”
2. The facilitator gives some background to the Synodal Process. Then the facilitator invites participants during the gathering to speak about the theme/topic Share your personal response and a community response. What have you encountered in journeying together/walking together?
3. Participants reflect silently for three minutes preparing their input. Open oneself to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is one reason why the synodal process is different and can be very creative.
4. Each person speaks for a maximum of three minutes. There is no cross talk.
5. Three more minutes of silent reflection. Each person takes private notes.
6. After re-reading their notes, each person shares for a further two minutes whatever has enlightened or resonated with them from the sharing of the other members. The participants are invited to consider what the Holy Spirit seemed to be calling them to, what paths are being opened.
7. Free-form time for “discerning and elaborating the synthesis.”

Happy Birthday!!! Are we SCC members ready to begin a new Liturgical Year on the 1st Sunday of Advent on 3 December, 2023? Do we know that it is Year B and that we use the Sunday Gospel readings from St. Mark's Gospel (the second Gospel in the New Testament).

Our analysis and assessment of the voting in the SCCs Poll over the years 2009 to 2023 is as follows:

1. Key words marked: Bible/Good News/Gospel/lectionary/Scripture/Lectio Divina/Word of God in **BLACK bold**; faith sharing in **ORANGE bold**; Pray/Prays/Prayer in **BLUE bold**; Synodality in **GREEN bold**; Jesus Christ in **RED bold**; and Covid in **DARK BLUE bold**.
2. The number of overall choices is close (826 on D: the dynamics/process/principles/classifications of SCCs and 871 on A: activities/content/Outreach/practical action of SCCs). Of the top 20 choices, 18 are A and only 2 are D. This reveals a voting preference for activities, etc.
3. Bible-related, etc. is the most common word (28), faith sharing the second most common word (21) and Pray/Prays/Prayer the third most common word (13).
4. Big difference in the choices of those who vote in person (paper and pen) and those who vote online.

Thank you for signing up for our FutureChurch online liturgy and faith sharing. We hope you'll join us today, 3 December 2023, at 7pm Eastern/6pm CT/5pm Mountain/4pm Pacific USA time. If you need help converting to your time zone, you can do so here:

<https://dateful.com/time-zone-converter>

Readings: <https://futurechurch.org/lectio.../b/first-sunday-of-advent/>

Discussion Questions: There will be approximately 20-25 minutes for small group sharing. Please make sure that everyone has an opportunity to share.

- In what ways do you long for God to rend the heavens and to come down amidst our global and local challenges?
- How is God calling you to be watchful and active as you wait?

Zoom Link for the liturgy:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89893572532...>

Meeting ID: 898 9357 2532

Passcode: 006110

Commentators on the Second Vatican Council describe French Dominican Father Yves Congar, OP, as the most important theologian at the council. This is no small compliment, for it aligns him with Karl Rahner, SJ, Henri de Lubac, SJ, Joseph Ratzinger and John Courtney Murray, SJ, as well as other luminaries of that remarkable generation. On page 341 of *Lay People in the Church*, Congar wrote that SCCs are “little church cells wherein the mystery is lived directly and with great simplicity...“the church’s machinery, sometimes the very institution, is a barrier obscuring her deep and living mystery, which they can find, or find again, only from below.”

A Catholic priest and former pastor in Paterson Diocese, New Jersey, USA writes: “Keep plugging for that Synodal Church... mutual collaboration at every level... pastors partnering with people and people with one another... it works... it works for you and it worked for me at St. Joseph Parish in Mendham, New Jersey where we had a Synodal Parish. The Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) had collaboration from both sides. For me the Synodal Process is mutual collaboration between the pastor/priest and the lay people as the People of God – with an emphasis on the “mutual.” We’re way ahead on the curve.”

There is a saying, "Go digital or die." Today, Saturday, 9 December, 2023, I joined live the members of St. Joachim SCC in Iramba Parish in Musoma Diocese (a rural diocese in northwestern Tanzania) for their weekly Gospel Reflection and Sharing. For the first time we used WhatsApp Video on the internet. It was 5 pm Tanzanian time and 9 am USA time (eight hours difference). Of the 20 members of the SCC, five participated: four women and one man. We read the Gospel of the Second Sunday of Advent, Year B in Swahili. We praised the example and teaching of John the Baptist. We said that SCCs are a sign of the Kingdom of God in our world today. We ended with a blessing in Swahili.

Request from Archbishop George Desmond Tambala, OCD, the Archbishop of Lilongwe Archdiocese in Malawi: "This week we in Lilongwe Archdiocese and as part of our diocesan synodal journey we have decided to do a thorough one year review and revisiting of the Small Christian Communities in our archdiocese. As you know with Bishop Patrick Kalilombe we were extremely blessed to have his vision and theology of the Small Christian Communities pioneered and implemented in our diocese. We feel that apart from the 'celebration' of the 50 years as guided by AMECEA we need to do a more prolonged review and reflection. The aim is to revitalise these SCCs in the light of the evolved times without losing the original spirit and aim. This will lead to the launch of a renewed concept and theology. Our challenge is to find someone or organization that can partner with us in terms of a research and revision exercise of the SCCs in our archdiocese. We will of course be

guided by the AMECEA framework but we want to do a more localized and more consulted process which will lead to the publication and implementation of this new life of the SCCs. We seek this technical assistance as well as funding from any organization you may know to assist us cover the costs of this exercise. Do you of any?"

Lilongwe Archdiocese in Malawi is an important example/model for all the dioceses in the AMECEA Region. The Golden Jubilee (2023-2024) of SCCs in Eastern Africa can be a "kairos" time for a local exercise to evaluate/assess/review/research/revisit/reflect on/revitalize our SCCs pastoral/ecclesial Model of Church.

From Francis Njuguna: "The Christmas celebrations are just about to come. Let us celebrate this grand feast faithfully. Our Father in Charge (Parish Priest) has this Sunday asked us to be mindful of the poor and hungry in our midst. He has asked the members of our SCCs (*jumuiyas*) to lead the way. This is Father James Marema of Our Church of Queen of the Holy Rosary, Komothai, Kiambu County, Kenya."

The facilitator of a weekly SCC gathering has a responsibility to prepare well himself/herself and to give a good introduction to the Gospel and the liturgical context.

Here is what I gave this week: "I call Advent "the both...and Liturgical Season." Both the Second Sunday of Advent that reminds us that it is a penitential season (thus the purple candle and purple vestments) and the figure of John the Baptist who emphasizes the "Baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." And then we look forward to the spirit of joyful expectation and the wondrous time of waiting for the coming of Jesus at Christmas in the Third Sunday of Advent (thus the pink candle and rose vestments)."

Catholic Campus Ministry (CCM) of Elon University, Elon, North Carolina, USA.

The earliest Christian Communities met in Small Communities, inside of their homes and were nourished by the Word of God in order to fulfill their mission as disciples of Christ. In that light, the community of Elon Catholic Campus Ministry (CCM) strives for the same within our own Small Communities. We come together to share our struggles, our joys, and the meaning of the Word of God in order to be better prepared to live out our faith journey. CCM Small Communities meet regularly once a week. We discuss various things, including how to live out our faith on campus, Scriptures for the upcoming Sunday Mass, and books of the *Bible*. Most importantly, we are there to support each other in friendship and fellowship. To join any of our groups, please reach out to one of the group leaders! Our Small Communities are always open to anyone wanting to join. If you have any questions, you can also contact T Huynh-Duc for more information.

I continue to do research on Campus Ministry Programs in the USA especially the activities of Student Small Christian Communities/ Small Faith Communities. On Tuesday, 12 December, 2023 I visited the University Ministries Program at the University of San Diego in San Diego, California, USA. They have a rich variety of University Ministries Faith Communities including (alphabetically):

- Ignite
- Maher Small Group
- Men's Group
- Torero Athletic Fellowship
- Vistas Small Group

- Women's Group

Resident Hall Assistants supervise the Small Groups. Most groups read and reflect upon the Gospel of the following Sunday with these steps:

1. We Gather in Prayer.
2. Read Gospel.
3. Reflect.
4. Consider.
5. Let Us Pray.
6. A Reflective Moment of Silence.
7. Additional Activities/Discussion.

A printed handout includes Questions and Gospel Action.

One concrete example is the Vistas Small Faith Sharing Group that meets Thursday 8 to 9 pm in the Palomar Multi-Purpose Room on campus. The group provides students a space to prayerfully reflect on where God is moving in one's life, build authentic relationships and build a rich faith that engages the world with others living in the Vistas, a resident hall. The weekly gatherings include some group dynamics activities.

The university chaplain said that the staff tries to equip the students with good habits of prayer, reflection and faith sharing to carry into the rest of their lives. **NOTE:** On some college campuses other organizations such as the Alumni Association and post graduate organizations such as the Jesuit Volunteers focus on Alumni Small Christian Communities/Small Faith Communities.

This is the fourth university that I have visited in California. The others are Loyola Marymount, Santa Clara and Stanford.

From Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI):

"How to be a Synodal Church on Mission"

Guidelines for local communities to prepare for the 2024 Synod.

We have received these guidelines from the Synod Office in Rome that will help lead members of local dioceses, parishes, and Small Christian Communities (SCCs) through the process of setting up synodal gatherings to call on the Spirit to open our minds and hearts as we share the important issues that we believe will help transform the Church into the kind of community that Jesus would want in today's world. [Click here to read these guidelines.](#)



SYNOD.VA`

How to be a synodal Church in mission?

How to be a synodal Church in mission?

This is a challenge to SCC members to participate actively in the Synodal Process.

A common mantra today is “go where the synodal energy is.” Here is an example:

How SCCs can be involved in the Synodal Church:

From the October, 2023 issue of *The Southern Cross*, the official newspaper of the Catholic Diocese of San Diego, California, USA: “The Synodal Process was carried out in Small Group Listening Sessions/Dialogues:

When: October, 2023

Where: in Parishes, Schools, Ministries, Small Communities, Apostolic Groups, Other Communities and Organizations

Languages: English, Spanish, Vietnamese

Format: Eight participants sitting in a circle around a Round Table sharing their experiences in turn.

Topic/Theme: “Reawakening the Eucharist in our Communities.”


Message to SCC members:

If you're unable to find or begin your own Synodal Gathering, join Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI) to participate. Beginning the first of the year 2024, CCRI will be facilitating monthly gatherings for all who have no other way to participate. These will be held at the following times:

- the 1st Saturday of every month beginning on January 6, 2024
- the 2nd Friday of every month beginning on January 12, 2024
- the second Saturday of every month beginning on January 13, 2024
- the third Wednesday of every month beginning on January 17, 2024

To find the times for you in your locale, click on our universal calendar now:

<https://spiritunbounded.org/calendar> Save this in a special place so you can access this at any time and learn what is going on worldwide and how and when to join. This calendar will show you the time of the meeting in your own time zone.



SPIRITUNBOUNDED.ORG
Calendar – Spirit Unbounded

Small Christian Communities members can learn about the steps of the Synodal Process in different ways. One way: in one specific gathering spend half of the time using the

steps of the Synodal Process and half of the time using the Parliamentary Process (normal business agenda). You will see a big difference. Part of the big difference is that the Synodal Process uses a small discernment reflection group process while the Parliamentary Process uses a small discussion group process.

SCC members fit into the Synodal Process of: "New consultations in every diocese."

These consultations are to be guided by this question: "How can we be a synodal Church in mission?" In practice, it would be more realistic for each local diocese "to focus on those aspects that enable it to make a contribution in the light of its own situation, character and experience", the new document says. "This work is not a question of starting the synodal process from scratch or repeating the process of listening and consultation undertaken during the first stage," the Synod office notes. Rather, it says the idea is to involve people "whose point of view is of particular help in focusing on the 'how'", the document points out, such as ordained ministers, pastoral leaders, consecrated persons, leaders of ecclesial movements and new communities, etc.

The Synod secretariat is urging each national bishops' conference to collect the various contributions and put them into a summary document consisting of no more than eight pages. These should be sent to the secretariat's office in Rome by May 15, 2024.

Read more at:



INTERNATIONAL.LA-CROIX.COM

[Synod office urges local dioceses to hold further consultations](#)

SCC members can take heart in Bishop Kevin Sweeney's inspiring words in the 7 December, 2023 issue of the "Beacon:"

Let us "journey together" on the "Synodal Way." If you have not yet had a chance to read the 41-page "Synthesis Report" from the first Assembly of the Synod on Synodality, Advent would be a great time to "listen" to what the Synod delegates are asking us to consider and bring to prayer, leading us to "Conversations in the Spirit."

If you may not have the time (or be inclined) to read the "Synthesis Report," you can still make the "Synodal Way" part of your Advent prayer and reflection. The word "synod" literally means "journeying together" or "walking together." As we consider the journey of

Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem and we join together with the whole Catholic Church on that spiritual journey, let us ask the Holy Spirit to guide us and our leaders to be attentive and watchful, listening to the ways in which the Lord continues to teach us and call us to holiness as His disciples.



RCDOP.ORG

The Advent Journey

On the First Sunday of Advent, together with the whole Church, we b

This message supports a prayerful, reflective style in our lives during this last week of Advent and into the Christmas season.

AMECEA: “Keep the Fire of Small Christian Communities Burning,” AMECEA Chairman in Christmas Message

By Sister Jecinter Antoinette Okoth, FSSA

The Chairman for the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) has called upon the people of God in the Eastern Africa Region to ensure that the fire that was lit to mark the golden jubilee of Small Christian Communities (SCCs), remains burning to strengthen evangelization at grassroots.

“The Church in Eastern Africa launched 50 years after the establishment of Small Christian Communities in the AMECEA region, a great tool and a new way of being a Church that was initiated as a result of putting the communion ecclesiology and teachings of Vatican II into practice and promoting communion and participation of all the faithful in the Church,” Bishop Charles Sampa Kasonde said in the statement shared with AMECEA Online Wednesday, 20 December 2023, adding that, “Our responsibility is therefore to keep the fire of Small Christian Communities burning in the region so that the seeds of Christian discipleship experienced, may ever remain a gift to the Catholic Church and the world.”

According to the Zambian Prelate and the Local Ordinary of Solwezi Diocese in Zambia, the SCCs model which was proposed by the AMECEA bishops in 1973 as a shift in the ecclesial model from the parish-centered to the church in the neighborhood, sharing the same way of life and living the Gospel values in the community, should enkindle “the spirit

of listening, discernment, and communion among the people of God for active participation in the Church, as we journey together in the mission of evangelization.”

Speaking on behalf of the AMECEA Bishops, the Chairman appreciated the active participation of the people of God in the region during the first phase of the synod which concluded in October, 2023. “In congruent with Pope Francis who has strongly emphasized journeying together as a church without leaving anyone behind, we appreciate the active participation of the AMECEA Church in the synodal journey from the Small Christian Communities to conferences and continental levels and finally through our delegates who devotedly participated in the first session of the Synod on synodality in Rome,” Bishop Kasonde said and continued, “The synodal process is still ongoing until October 2024, I invite each one of us to play his/her role as we encourage a church that listens by allowing the Holy Spirit at the center of our discernment.”



COMMUNICATIONS.AMECEA.ORG

[AMECEA: “Keep the Fire of Small Christian Communities Burning,” AMECEA Chairman in Christmas Message](#)

[AMECEA: “Keep the Fire of Small Christian Communities Burning,” AMECEA Chairman in Christmas Message](#)

It is interesting that Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, one of the Bishop Founders of SCCs in the AMECEA Region, used this metaphor of "keep your home fires burning" when he launched SCCs in Rulenge Diocese, Tanzania in 1973.

American Maryknoll Missionary priest Father Herb Gappa, MM died on 22 December, 2023. RIP. Here is a story from our free Ebook on “Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa: ”American Maryknoll missionary priest Father Herb Gappa, MM, a parish priest in Bariadi Parish in Shinyanga Diocese, Tanzania, tried to visit three neighborhood SCCs in his mainly rural parish during the middle of the week, for example, Monday, Wednesday and Friday afternoons. By listening carefully to the SCC members’ reflections on the Scripture readings of the following Sunday, he found that over half of his Sunday homily was already ‘written’ for him.”

Why can't more parish priests, deacons, etc. discover this wonderful way of preparing their Sunday Homilies.

Mwanajumuiya Aloysius Mugishagwe writes: "As the Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community in our gathering on 2 December, 2024, we shared about "The most important issue facing the Catholic Church in 2024" where all the members gave their views.

It is always a great pleasure to listen to the young people as they articulate issues about the Catholic Church and the society. Personally I am happy for spending this year as a member of the Young Adult Seekers. I have learnt a lot in this experience. This is a home away from home because I have gotten a chance to freely share my ideas with people from different parts of the world that I wouldn't have met if it was not for this SCC.

There is a saying: *If your presence doesn't make an impact, your absence won't make a difference.* Therefore as Young People, we can do something about the challenges in the Catholic Church and our society at large. Thank you all the members of this SCC for being part of the family.

Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year 2024 to you all. Blessings.

During our St. Isidore Online SCCs Gathering on 26 December, 2023, I told a true Christmas story that I used in my Christmas Homily this year in Limerick, Ireland. Mwanajumuiya Alphonse Omolo asked me to post it on our SCCs Facebook Page. <https://www.facebook.com/groups/875453985953421>

A friend of mine in Cork, Ireland told me that over the years his daughter slowly drifted away from the Catholic Church until she no longer participated in Mass on Sunday. At the beginning of December, 2023 she gave birth to a baby boy. At around the same time the Youth Club in their local Catholic Parish in Cork was preparing its annual Christmas Play/Nativity Play. They announced that they were looking for a real baby for the play and sent out an announcement. The father phoned his daughter and very carefully and cautiously asked her if she would "lend" her baby for the play. The daughter happily replied: "Of course, when is the first rehearsal? May the young people please be gentle in rocking my baby." Her father was overjoyed. The baby performed before the Christmas Eve Mass and the daughter has returned going to church. Indeed, *God's ways are not our ways.*

I have posted this story on different websites, Facebook Pages and social media networks including email messages. Here are some interesting comments:

- The story inspires all of us to "lend our babies" '👶' for the 'Christmas plays' of the world around us 🙏👤.
- Good insight.
- Inspiring story. 🙏
- Interesting. Loved the mother's "May the young people please be gentle in rocking my baby."
- Your mother and baby story from Cork is the exception that proves the rule: Two generations in Ireland have walked away from the Institutional Catholic Church in which they have lost trust because of clerical abuse cover ups and the way women and LGBTQ people are treated.

- Wow. A nice story. God's ways of thinking are different from ours. The distance between the two thoughts are like heaven and earth.
- Thanks for sharing the baby and mother story. Basically, both the child and the mother have returned to the Catholic Church. Now the baby will be baptized.

As we try to live "community" and "synodality" this holy season, let us remember **ONLY TWO GROUPS FOUND THE CHRIST CHILD: THE SHEPHERDS AND THE WISE MEN.**

ANNOUNCEMENT: It is important that we continue to evaluate our SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa so we can make it better. Please vote in the current polls.

Eighty-Ninth Round -- The best part of my Small Christian Community is:...
(January – February 2024):

1. Structure of fraternity and support.
2. Experience with SCCs has informed my understanding of Synodality.
3. Word of God as the adhesive on which SCCs is centered.
4. Walking together with Jesus Christ.
5. Praying together for the victims of natural disasters.
6. Groundwork for a Synodal Parish.

Vote at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>



smallchristiancommunities.org
Small Christian Communities
Small Christian Communities, Eastern Africa, church

These six selections highlight SCCs activities in 2024 when we continue to celebrate the 50th Anniversary (1973 -- 2023) of SCCs in Eastern Africa.

Congratulations on the good teamwork -- walking together in the spirit and practice of the Synodal Process.

Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa. This "Fourth Edition" (19 chapters, 1,521 pages, 1,514 footnotes) will be published as an Ebook and Print on Demand (POD) Paperback on Amazon in 2024. This edition includes Case Studies and experiences during the March, 2020 to 2023 Covid-19 pandemic and during the 2021-2024 Synod of Bishops.

This is the latest SCCs Website Online Version of the Double Spearhead Nos. 199-200 (2012) Paperback Book *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of SCCs in Eastern Africa* published by AMECEA Gaba Publications — CUEA Press in Eldoret, Kenya. This online version is updated as of 21 December, 2023.

The complete book is found on the Ebooks page or by clicking here. The book is also available as Part 1 and Part 2 for those with poor internet connection or challenges in downloading the full version. Part 1 can be downloaded by clicking here while Part 2 can be downloaded by clicking here. To order the printed paperback book click here.

Part 1 of *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* (1 to 908 pages)

Part 2 of *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* (909 to 1521 pages)

Full Version of *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*

<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/building-the-church-as-family-of-god-evaluation-of-small-christian-communities-in-eastern-africa-2/>

I have been updating, revising and editing this Ebook for 12 years with the help and support of many people. Hopefully, the carefully researched footnotes (1,514!!!) and extensive "Select Annotated Bibliography" of 566 entries will help professional theologians and others.

Joseph Healey, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*, Eldoret, Kenya: 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, revised and edited from the 2012 print version, is now in its Fourth Revised Edition and available as a free, online Ebook containing 1,520 pages and 1,514 footnotes as of 21 December 2023 on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website:

https://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf (Title Page)

<https://smallchristiancommunities.org/building-the.../> (Full version)



SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa – Small Christian Communities

Small Christian Communities

We thank very much one of our Kenyan webmasters, Mwanajumuiya Peter Kyalo, for updating this Online Ebook. He writes: "I have maintained the links/urls and the names of the three files. I expect no challenge in posting on 3rd Party websites." You are welcome to post this Online Ebook on different websites, databases and digital repositories.

Comments on this Ebook are recorded according the time they were received:

1. Kenyan: "Thanks for this sharing. The whole history of our Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is here. May the spirit that saw the work take off a number of years ago continue to guide us. May the founders of this work continue to inspire us. Amen."
2. Cameroonian: "Thank you very much for making the electronic copy of this wonderful book available to all of us. It will be a very helpful resource. I will amend my syllabus for this semester and include this Ebook."
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6. Kenyan: "This is a milestone. You have come from far and you're still going far. i know it has taken your time and resources in order to complete this Ebook and that is not a walk in the park. You have set the highest bar and example for us and the generation to come."

Announcing a new website:

Heart of the Church: Journeying Together

<https://www.heartofthechurch.org/024/>

To become the Ecclesia God is calling us to be. First belong -- then believe, share and serve. Small Communities are the Heart of the Church. This website is designed primarily to enable our Small Christian Community, dedicated to Prisca and Aquila, to keep a record of our discoveries as we walk the Christian road together. You are welcome to look around and hopefully be inspired to start your own small group.



[HEARTOFTHECHURCH.ORG](https://www.heartofthechurch.org)

Home

Our faith lives in our hearts

This SCCs Facebook Page can be a forum for an exchange of ideas and experiences. Comments on this website state: "I like the title and the opening photo. Very synodal. I like the statement: "Small communities meet regularly, usually weekly."

For us in Eastern Africa this is key. Our SCC Model of Church is built on weekly lectionary-based faith sharing when we read the Gospel of the following Sunday and apply it to our daily lives. We meet 52 weeks out of the year – not just "seasonal groups."

The only part I don't like on your website is the Latin word "Ecclesial." Young people have told us: "Please don't use Latin. It is churchy language and turns young people off."

Valerie Stroud writes from England: "I think your young people are saying something, in rejecting Latin/Greek words, on behalf of us all. All of us feel battered and, dare I say it, turned off by the unexplained jargon hurled around in Catholic Church circles. As the saying goes: "why make it simple, when it can be so beautifully complicated?" To explain our use of the Greek word, *ecclesia*. We are using the word for "Church" in the sense of the original language of the *New Testament*, describing a gathering of people called out into community by Christ, not a community at the mercy of domination by clericalism and patriarchy, *kyriarchy* (church). We have learned from the work of Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza on this subject, especially her 1995 address to the Women's Ordination Conference, remembered by some of us."

SCC members in the USA in 2024 are encouraged to participate in diocesan listening sessions regarding two guiding questions posed by the Vatican Synod Secretariat: 1. "Where have I seen or experienced successes -- and distresses -- within the Church's structure(s)/organization/leadership/life that encourage or hinder the mission?" and 2. "How can the structures and organization of the Catholic Church help all the baptized to respond to the call to proclaim the Gospel and to live as a community of love and mercy in Christ?"

An immediate "structure" is the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC). Does it exist in your parish? Is it active? Is it representative (for example, having young people delegates)? Are SCC leaders represented? Is the PPC involved in decision-making in the parish?

A doable agenda for changes at the Second Session in October, 2024 is lay preaching. We have to keep pushing for lay people, including women, to be able to "officially" preach at Sunday masses and liturgies.

As we share Synodal Resources the monthly 32-page Catholic newspaper called *The Synodal Times* produced by *The Irish Times* in Dublin, Ireland is excellent. Good articles and commentary. I have not seen a similar publication in the USA. *The Synodal Times* is a monthly publication that provides news, features, and commentary on the ongoing Synod. The Synod on Synodality aims to bring people to a deeper experience of "being Church together." Its goal is to ensure that the magisterium exercises its function as the facilitator of dialogue and communion within the Catholic Church. Print and digital subscriptions are available. Go to: <https://www.synodaltimes.com/>

SYNODALTIMES.COM

Home - Synodal Times

We SCC members can learn from this insight from a Religious Sister in Madagascar: "The Synodal journey is not always a bed of roses, without problems, but I am convinced that with the willingness to walk together and to bear difficulties, we will achieve tangible results, because *if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together* (African proverb)."

Reflections on "Community" by Ray Timmerman in Canada:

I think what you are doing in India, similar to the "Jumuiya" (SCCs) in Kenya and the Basic Christian Communities in Central/South America are so critical to the wellbeing and future of the Church. If we do not find ways to be Domestic Churches, we will not long survive in our Mega Churches, I think. Each may have a different role, but they are all equal,

be it the family at home, the Base Christian Community, the parish, the diocese, or the Global Church.

Good analysis of the different levels of "church" starting from below with the family = domestic church.

From the GENERAL SECRETARIAT OF THE SYNOD XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS (11 December, 2023)

Towards October 2024

“To be clear, this work is not a question of starting the synodal process from scratch or repeating the process of listening and consultation undertaken during the first stage. In this stage, in addition to the participatory bodies at diocesan level and the synodal team already established, it will be important to involve people and groups that express a variety of experiences, skills, charisms, ministries within the People of God and whose point of view is of particular help in focusing on the ‘how’: e.g. ordained ministers (in particular parish priests); other pastoral leaders (e.g. catechists and leaders of grassroots communities and Small Christian Communities, particularly in some regions; leaders of pastoral offices); consecrated men and women; leaders of Lay Associations, Ecclesial Movements and new Communities; people who hold positions of responsibility in Church-related institutions and organizations (schools, universities, hospitals, reception centers, cultural centers, etc.); theologians and canonists, etc.”

It is significant that in an official Vatican Document "the leaders of Small Christian Communities" are now specifically recognized as important in the ongoing Synodal Process in the Catholic Church.

The "2024 Calendar" can be found on the left hand side of the Home Page of the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website. Beneath the photo of the lion click on "Monthly 2024 Calendar": <https://afriprov.tangaza.ac.ke/> If we SCC members want to be Lectionary Based Faith Sharing Catholics, this calendar gives all the feasts of the Liturgical Year, Saints' Days, memorials and other helpful information.

To get the "African Proverb of the Month" click on "2024 African Proverbs of the Month." Welcome.

How this Facebook Page is used as a Forum and Exchange of SCCs ideas:.

A Religious Sister from St. Joseph Convent, Khandwa, India writes on this topic: SCC PRAYER MEETING: HOW TO CONDUCT IN A NEW AND A MEANINGFUL WAY: "I am enriched by the 12 steps conducting SCC prayers. Kindly guide in Hindi or English if there is any other method or reflection. I will be grateful."

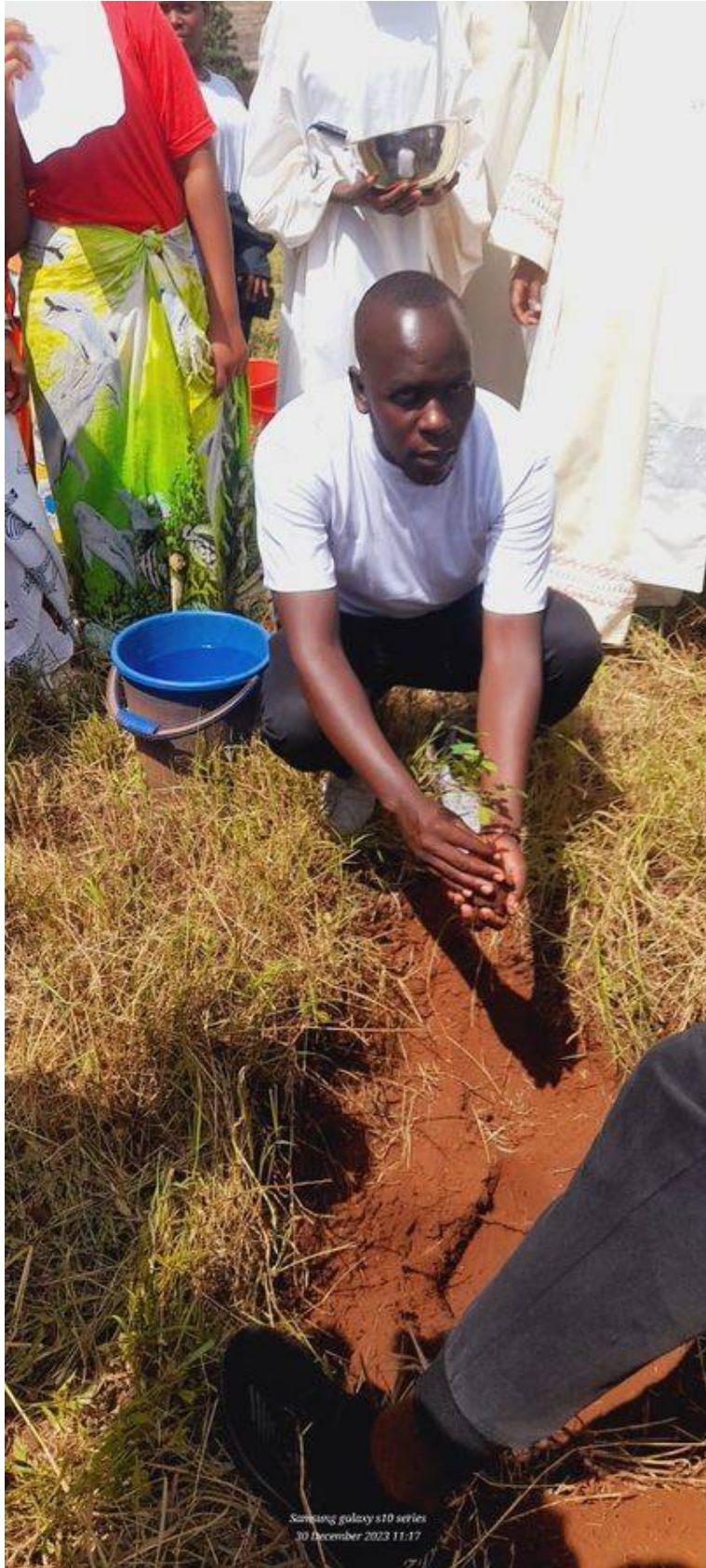
Our answer: "If you go to our free, Online Ebook: Joseph Healey, "Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa" https://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf you will find an “APPENDIX of 28 Online E-Resource Materials on the On-going Formation and Training of Small Christian Community (SCC) Leaders and Members” to meet all your needs.

SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

smallchristiancommunities.org

The Young People Seekers Small Christian Community Fund has been used for this project: “This is how the young people from St. Antony of Padua, Emali, Ngong, Kenya ended the year 2023 and welcomed 2024 in style. They were joined by the main celebrant for the Youth mass Father Chege, a religious sister, the catechist and their matron. They planted the remaining seedlings out of the 250 shared among four outstations at St. Martin of Tours, Sultan Hamud Parish. Let's continue praying for the young people to be friends of the church. *One hand washes the other.*”

Let us remember that our projects should have a small community dimension, that is, carried out *kisinodi* or *kijumuiya* as we say in Swahili.



May our Synodal SCCs participate actively in the "Synodal Interim Stage" of the 2021 to 2024 Synodal Process that goes until the Second Session that begins in Rome in October, 2024. In a USCCB (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops) sponsored webinar on 9 January, 2024 yesterday, Bishop Daniel Flores of the Diocese of Brownsville, Texas, USA emphasized the importance of regular Bible Sharing in Small Groups (what we in Eastern Africa call Small Christian Communities).

Please vote in our SCCs Poll at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/> One choice is: The best part of my Small Christian Community is..."Groundwork for a Synodal Parish."

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7. Kenyan: "Thanks for making this Ebook available. Very useful to the Catholic Church of today, tomorrow and even the future. I think Professor Philomena Mwaura can arrange for this Fourth Revised Edition of our Ebook to be added to the E-Resources in the library at Kenyatta University in Nairobi. She's at a better position to do it."
8. USA: "I'm glad that I've been able to assist you over the years. Congrats on all that you've accomplished."
9. USA: Good work! I'm exhausted just leafing through all these pages. Can't imagine how you feel and how many hours of work you put into this. God bless you for all you do.
10. Malawi: "Thanks for the update on the Ebook. I will follow it up with Sr. Jecinter on publishing an article in the 'AMECEA Online News.'"
11. Kenya: "This is very important resource material, with research work done for 12 years. "
12. Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC): "I have posted the link on the African Proverbs, Saying and Stories WhatsApp Page."
13. Tanzania: "Thanks. Posting the link online is very creative."

Another exchange:

"Congratulations for your excellent work that has answered a great need to build the Church as a Family of God. You have brought your work in this very relevant time of celebrating the 50 years of Small Christian Communities (SCCs). May the Lord carry on blessing you always on the way to the Heavenly Kingdom."

"Yes, you have emphasized two important aspects of our Ebook:

1. "Building the Church as the Family of God" is one of the most important theological and pastoral contributions of the African Church to the Universal Church during the ongoing Synodal Process.

2. This Fourth Revised Edition is posted online during this very relevant time when we are celebrating 50 years of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa.

Many different types of Online/Virtual/Digital SCCs are emerging. A SCC leader from Denver, Colorado, USA describes her spiritual, not religious, focused Encouragement Small Community called "Women's Story Circle." It meets at 1 pm Eastern Time every Thursday. It is ecumenical. She writes: "I do weekly meditations on Zoom with a group from Florida. Another member downloads meditations a couple times daily for pain and stress. Another Zoom SCC is a monthly faith sharing group of women from Florida. What did we do before internet?"

Kenya's Nakuru Diocese will be marking the 2024 Pastoral Year under the theme, "Proclamation of the Word of God." Bishop Cleophas Oseso urged the People of God in his Episcopal See to "read this Word, mark it, learn it, digest it, and guard it for it is a lamp to our feet, a light to our path. I also encourage you to adopt the five-step method of *Lectio Divina* (Read, Meditate, Pray, Contemplate and Action)," he said, adding that the Word is "God's instrument to lead us into holiness." This is a special opportunity for our weekly gatherings of SCCs that emphasize Lectionary Based Faith Sharing.



ACIAFRICA.ORG

Proclamation of the Word of God Theme for Kenyan Diocese's Pastoral Year 2024

For SCC members here are the:

"Seven Steps in a Listening Session in the Synodal Process"

One hour if there are eight participants. **NOTE:** If participants share for less than three minutes/two minutes each, the total time will be less.

1. Opening Prayer: "We stand before you, Holy Spirit."
2. The facilitator gives some background to the Synodal Process. Then the facilitator invites participants during the gathering to speak about the issue/topic/theme
 Share your response. What have you encountered in journeying together/walking together?

3. Participants reflect silently for three minutes preparing their input. Open oneself to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Use spiritual conversation or conversation in the Spirit. This is one reason why the synodal process is different and can be very creative.
4. Each person speaks for a maximum of three minutes. There is no cross talk.
5. Three more minutes of silent reflection. Each person takes private notes.
6. After re-reading their notes, each person shares for a further two minutes whatever has enlightened or resonated with them from the sharing of the other members. The participants are invited to consider what the Holy Spirit seemed to be calling them to, what paths are being opened.
7. Open exchange of views for “discerning and elaborating the synthesis.”

This same Synodal Process can be described as a roundtable discernment in the Holy Spirit that involves three steps:

1. First, each person shares their experience and thoughts on the issue.
2. Second, after a period of silent prayer and reflection, each person shares how they were moved by what they heard.
3. Third, another period of silent prayer and reflection is followed by an open exchange of views.

Feedback on our Ebook comes from two long time SCCs leaders:

1. Brother Bob Moriarty, SM, now based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA: "Congratulations! Your fidelity to this project over these years is an inspiration to us all." Bob is mentioned 10 times in the Ebook. He has written extensively on SCCs and directed many SCC formation and training programs.

1.

2. Mwanajumuiya Michael Orondo, Nairobi, Kenya: "Thank you very much for this synodality way of life." Michael is mentioned 14 times in the Ebook. He is a leader of St. Kizito SCC in the Waruku Section of St. Austin's Parish, Nairobi Archdiocese especially promoting justice and peace activities.

Little Brother of the Gospel Alain Ragueneau writes: “Here in France I belong to several Small Communities. People need to meet, be listened to and share the Word of God. Some are not seen often in churches, but they are faithful to their Small Communities.” This is the local reality in the USA today especially among Young People.”

In the USA SCC members can share the Word of God daily, weekly, twice a month, once a month, etc. on many different social media platforms. A big question: If these people are not going to a physical church on Sunday or are watching Sunday Mass on Zoom, they are not receiving the Eucharist. What are their views on this lack?

On Mondays many SCC members start preparing the Scripture Readings for the following Sunday. How many of us remember that the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B (21 January, 2024) is the Sunday of the Word of God (proclaimed by Pope Francis in 2019 – five years ago)? If we SCC members are Lectionary based Faith Sharing Catholics, the *Bible* should be our DNA.

Many SCC members take the *Bible* seriously and reflect on the *Gospel* regularly. But if this year we "forgot" that the Third Sunday of Ordinary Time is the Sunday of the Word of God what does that say? After five years of proclamation and catechesis has Pope Francis'

stress on the importance of this Sunday reached the “tipping point?” No. We still have a long way to go. May the Holy Spirit guide us.

Email exchange with Ugandan theologian Peter Kanyandago:

Peter: "Thanks so much for sharing with us this Ebook -- an invaluable resource on SCCs. You call it an evaluation. One could call it a small encyclopedia on SCCs. You have made it even easier to use by putting it online. As I scrolled the text, I thought about two people who must be happy about its publication, but they are no longer with us. They are in heaven and must have supported you from there as you worked on this "granary" (to continue with an African image) with food on SCCs. You might have guessed who these two are: Professor John Mary Waliggo and Professor Laurenti Magesa whom you knew very well. I was also amused by the names the Africans gave you. This means that you have become, in a sense, part of the African culture and landscape! Thanks so much again, and may the New Year 2024 bring you blessings and fulfilment of your dreams for yourself and for all of us."

Myself: "Many thanks for your warm and friendly message. So many memories. “Let us harvest the memories.” I am very grateful for my many African friends. May many teachers and students in Uganda use this Ebook.

Professor John Mary Waliggo...If you remember it was Bishop Joe Mukwaya who initiated me in the Buffalo Clan and gave me the name "Ssentamu" that means cooking pot. John's sister married a Buffalo who worked in the embassy in Addis Ababa. John called me his brother-in-law.

Professor Laurenti Magesa...You drove all the way around the lake to participate in his 40th Anniversary of Priesthood at Makoko, Musoma, Tanzania. You and I had a long chat. You told me that the two actions that would reform the Catholic Church are: 1. Pope Francis would appoint pastoral-minded “Francis Bishops.” 2. Reform of the seminary system. Very insightful. I quote this in my Ebook.

I like your granary image."

It is important that we send our SCCs views directly to delegates who will be participating in the October, 2024 Second Synod Session. Here are ways that delegates express their views:

- Reports of the Roundtable Groups of 10 people each
- Press Conferences/Briefings
- Testimonies in Plenary Sessions
- Interventions in Plenary Sessions
- Interviews
- Blogs
- Articles/Stories
- Websites

Research shows that each delegate at the October, 2023 First Session had input into five Roundtable Reports on five different topics/themes that were entered into the official record. **NOTE:** Here is where I think the specific term “Small Christian Communities” came up.

Interesting email exchange:

Laura Dodson is a SCC leader and animator from Orlando Diocese, Florida, USA. She writes: "In my 30 years of RCIA and SCC ministry, I have experienced the true value of SCCs in people and in the Catholic Church. I have so enjoyed reading your book -- a quick scan since last night and your reflections in our email exchange. As you indicated it is deepening our understanding and relationship to God speaking through Scripture to our hearts and applying it to our daily lives. The three catechetical questions from *Sharing the Light of Faith*: What touched you? What's happening in your life that those words touched you? And the mission component: What are you called to do or change?"

From your book one of the quotes that truly resonates is on page 622: "SCCs reflect on human problems in light of the Gospel and makes theology relevant to daily life." It's the incarnation -- the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. I don't know that people are making that connection. It's not a "Bible" study, but listening to God speak to their hearts through Scripture. I love that ah-hah moment when people realize that yes, the God of the universe is speaking directly to them. Then the desire for Eucharist becomes the hunger you reference, and of course the desired outcome, to become what we eat."

Myself: "A Ganda, Uganda proverb says *relationship is in the eating together* that can be the starting point for a rich eucharistic theology. In Holy Communion in receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ we deepen our relation with the most important person in our lives Jesus Christ. And we deepen the relationship with each other in the Eucharistic Community. Research shows that Young People are attracted to the person of Jesus Christ and deepen their relationship him through mass, receiving the Eucharist and Eucharistic Adoration.

A specific pastoral challenge in Africa today is what we call the "Eucharistic Famine" (also called the "Eucharistic Hunger" or the "Eucharistic Drought" or the "Eucharistic Desert"). Due to the lack of male celibate priests, on any given Sunday most Catholics in Africa (up to 60% in some surveys) participate in a "Sunday Service Without a Priest" or a "Communion Service. especially in rural areas rather than participate in a regular mass. This is popularly called "the Eucharistic Famine." In some of these services communion is distributed by the catechist or by a trained and installed lay leader. In general the AMECEA Bishops do not have the Eucharist reserved in outstation chapels mainly because of security issues and do not allow the catechists to give out communion because of the abuses that have taken place."

A regular feature of our weekly SCC gatherings is the "takeaway." The online Notre Dame Gospel Reflection offers a good takeaway for today's Third Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B: "Lastly, what "nets" exactly is God asking us to abandon—perhaps sinful habits, excessive worry, or other stresses that aren't good for us and don't bring peace or joy anyway? I think Christ is asking us the same thing that he asked of his disciples so long ago: will you die to yourself and your personal agenda and let Jesus live in you a little more each day? What is one small way that we can do that today?"

Some feedback: The "one small way" that I could act today is to vote in our SCCs Poll on: "Walking together with Jesus Christ." To vote go to: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>

Father Eamon Tobin Website
<https://eamontobin.com>

Eamon Tobin was an Irish-born diocesan priest in Orlando Diocese, Florida, USA who died on 1 January, 2021. He was a great animator and promoter of Small Christian Communities. He was a prolific writer who had his own Website. He wrote: “As the pastor of a large, active Catholic parish I have been called to write many documents, letters and reflections over the years. I have collected and published many of them here on my website. Most of these writings have been previously published on the Ascension Catholic Church of Melbourne Florida website. You will also find information on the books I have published and links to purchase these books.

“Small Christian Communities Commentaries” follow the three year Liturgical Cycle (available in English, Spanish, and Vietnamese). There you will find faith-sharing questions that seek to connect the readings to daily lives, as well as a link to “Guidelines for Facilitators.”

For the "Takeaway" in our St. Isidore SCC Gathering today on the Gospel of the disciples following Jesus, I said that I would encourage Young Adults to vote in our SCCs Poll for: "Walking together with Jesus Christ." Go to: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org>

Today James Mhangwa, Jesca Donisian, Alloys Nyakundi and I had a very good online editing session on their report: "Tanzanian SCCs Research Project." In the closing prayer Jesca prayed that "we may edit for the glory of God." Amen. Allys Nyakundi adds: “It was a good reminder that everything we are doing is in the glory and honor of God and not human beings.”

It is good to get SCCs news from the grassroots. Alex Sakuwa writes from Kakamega Diocese in Kenya. St. Joseph SCC is a new SCC named after Bishop Joseph Obanyi. The bishop encouraged the SCC members to carry out the *Wezesha Mjane* Project to help widows and to improve food security during this year. St. Joseph SCC is seeking for help from other SCCs to purchase books for their members. Can anyone help? In our SCCs Poll Alex voted for: "Structure of Fraternity and Support."

In Papua, Indonesia Kristiana writes about a SCC of 15 passionate young environmentalists joining forces to plant mangrove seedlings. This is a small community in action promoting the care of creation. The five colored photos really show well how the mangrove seedlings are planted in the water.

There is a saying in communications: "Marketing is key." Two days ago I uploaded the latest version of our Ebook on "SCCs in Eastern Africa" on the Academia.edu Website. So far I have gotten 19 views from the following countries: Malawi, India, United States, Italy, Namibia, Israel, Nigeria, Argentina, Botswana, Zambia, South Africa, Kenya, and Sri Lanka. This is an interesting cross-section of the world.

In an interview with *ACI Africa* following the Sunday of the Word of God Year 2024 that was marked on 21 January 2024, Father Bonaventure Luchidio went on to explain the value of the *Bible* in the reality of Small Christian Communities (SCCs), a new way of being church that the leadership of the Catholic Church in Africa has included in its evangelization structures.

“While reading the *Bible*, God actively speaks to the hearts of each person present in the gathering. As each person shares their reflections, God strengthens our resolve and when we pray together in our voices God listens to our prayers,” he said.

The Nairobi-based member of the Clergy of Kenya's Kakamega Diocese emphasized the need for *Bible* Sharing during gatherings in SCCs, distinguishing these SCCs gatherings from those of self-help groups where financial matters take center stage.

"The *Bible* is key and central in SCCs formation and enterprise," Luchidio said and added, "Reading of the Word of God in the SCCs builds up the Body of Christ in prayer and adoration of God." The Kenyan Catholic Priest further said, "Our faith is strengthened more when we share our stories and experiences of our encounter with the word of God."

This is a key statement about the importance of Lectionary based Faith Sharing in our weekly SCCs gatherings.

Developing/Evolving a Synodal Language:

Here are some expressions (alphabetical) from a recent seminar in Nairobi, Kenya for members of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) and the Council of European Catholic Bishops' Conferences (CCEE):

African perspective with its emphasis on communal values and practices
 Aligning the Catholic Church with the demands and challenges of the 21st century
 Allow the Holy Spirit to guide our discussions/deliberations
 Build bridges of brotherhood and sisterhood
 Global Catholic Church's journey towards a more synodal structure
 Guided by the Spirit of Jesus
 How the Catholic Church can listen to young people in Africa and Europe in the light of the synodal process
 Inspired by the spirit of the ongoing synod to preserve unity in diversity
 Laity's participation is as vital as that of the clergy
 Our unity in Jesus Christ is pivotal to our mission
 Preserve the faith and culture of diverse peoples
 Preserve unity in diversity
 School of synodality
 Significance of a "healthy" decentralization in the Catholic Church
 Synodality: Africa and Europe walking together
 Towards a more missionary, collaborative and inclusive Catholic Church
 Unique cultural and ecclesial identities
 We are all learners in this shared journey of faith
 Youth bring unique perspectives and energy

We can apply some of these Synodal Expressions to our Synodal SCCs such as "African perspective with its emphasis on communal values and practices."

It is important to trace the origin and development of the title *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*. This Ebook has gone through various versions and editions. The "First Version" was given as a paper on "Small Christian Communities in the AMECEA Region: An Evaluation of their Growth and Impact" in March, 2011. Many pastoral leaders including AMECEA bishops recommended the importance of a thorough critical evaluation and assessment of SCCs to learn from the past and to help plan for the future. This includes ongoing strategic follow-up. Evaluation has been a key part of the growth of SCCs over these 51 years (1973 to 2024).

The term "Church as the Family of God" came in as AMECEA celebrated its Golden Jubilee in June, 2011. It goes back to the First African Synod in Rome in April, 1994 that emphasized the African ecclesiology of the Catholic Church as the Family of God and developed the specific ecclesial identity of the Catholic Church as the Family of God in Africa.

Putting these two ideas together created the actual title of the CUEA Press printed book *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* in 2012. Various editions of the Ebook have followed.

The 2021 to 2024 Synodal Process in the World Church has affirmed the value and relevancy of this title. Two Pillars of Synodality ("walking together") in Africa are the family and SCCs. We have Synodal Families and Synodal SCCs in Africa.

Go to: https://smallchristiancommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Build_new.pdf

Case Study of the weekly *Lectio Divina* at Portsmouth Abbey School in Rhode Island, USA:

While the Manquehue Apostolic Movement (MAM) groups from Chile focus primarily on *Lectio Divina*, teaching this practice of scripture-based prayer to students, the "sharing of the love for God" is bolstered and expanded in an emphasis on *acompañamiento* – essentially making friends, joining in the lives of students as sports fans, participating in various other school activities. This is also seen in the practice of *tutoria*, in which older students serve as mentors, offering positive and supportive help to those in the school community. This varied engagement in school life is in fact, most fundamentally, evangelization: of meeting others where they are, accompanying them on their journey. Adding to this their own community's shared life and practice of *lectio divina*, their assistance with the Confirmation retreat, the planning of a "Lectio Party" to celebrate the term, and much more, the group develops a busy and well-rounded experience, offering a valuable service to the school community.

The visitors are four college-age young men, all products of the Manquehue schools and currently on their summer break. Ms. Lauren Revay, the assistant director of spiritual life, has been working closely with the group to assist in their integration into school life. She noted in a recent school publication: "They share their love for God, not only in the theological sense through studies but also the personal impact God has had in their lives, helping our students to encounter God as well."

NEWS FROM THE PACTPAN NETWORK Weekly podcast:

Publications and Congratulations

E-Book by Joe Healey

We are delighted to announce that one of our esteemed members, Rev. Fr. Joseph Healey, has recently authored the 4th edition of his pastoral/spiritual book titled *Building the Church as a Family of God: Evaluating Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*. This edition focuses on evaluating Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa. The document is available as a free online e-Book, featuring 19 insightful chapters. Feel free to explore and

immerse yourself in the wisdom shared by Rev. Fr. Joseph Healey as we collectively engage in this enriching spiritual journey.

Below is the link to the book:

https://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf (Full Version)

Throughout the world many parishes, universities/colleges and religious communities have weekly Lenten Season SCCs. Here is one example from Princeton University, New Jersey, USA: "As we move closer to Lent, be sure to sign up for a Small Group Bible Study. Let Jesus, through His Word, accompany you during these days of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving ahead." In the USA often "Small Group" is substituted for "Small Community" and "Bible Study" for "Bible Reflection."

"Accompany" has a rich meaning and value here.

As we write articles about our Online SCCs it is helpful to include a Screen Shot to help the readers/the viewers learn about the participants and include a hyperlink to online social media such as Facebook. Here is an example:

Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Communities Facebook Page (Public Group)
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/919056526257607>

This Facebook Page was formed to help young people develop a personal relationship with one another, grow their relationship with the Lord, network young people through Small Christian Communities, support the marginalized in our local communities and help young people develop a sense of pride. It is connected to the twice monthly Zoom Gatherings. The Young Seekers come from Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, Tanzania, Uganda and the United States.



A Catholic lay woman deeply involved in the reform movement writes: “There must be millions of Catholics all over the world who have a dream summed up in the *Constitution for the Catholic Church*. How do we contribute to enabling them to have the joy of being God’s family, seeking to make the world and all it contains a better place? Like Joe, Alloys and several others, I believe the answer is in Small Christian Communities, centred on the wisdom of the Scriptures and the teaching of many wise people both past and present. We

don't have to throw out everything the institution proposes, but select what is life-promoting, compassionate and good for individuals and society.”

People ask: How are we a Synodal SCC in the spirit of walking together? An example: Today in our weekly St. Isidore SCC I prepared my reflection on next Sunday's *Gospel* ahead of time in the usual way -- using the mantra “let us go on to the nearby villages.” Then at our actual gathering I first read Brenda's reflection in the Chat Box and in a synodal way, I changed/adapted my reflection and responded to her. She said that Jesus first went to a deserted place to pray. Then after prayer he came back to his disciples and told them, “let us go to the nearby villages that I may preach there also.” When it was my turn in a synodal way I added to Brenda's insight saying that prayer helped Jesus to understand his ministry was missionary – going out to other villages, communities and people.

As part of my talks on "Small Christian Communities" on Monday, 29 January, 2024 at Saint Philip Prep, Clifton, New Jersey, USA as part of Catholic Schools Week, here is the outline of the “Morning Assembly.”

Saint Philip Preparatory School
Clifton, New Jersey, USA
Monday, 29 January, 2024
Catholic Schools Week
Morning Assembly at 8 am

Theme: "**Saint Philip Prep Students are Missionary Disciples**"

Opening Prayer: “African Glory Be To the Father” (in African languages)

Gospel: *Mark* 16: 15-20.

One minute of silence. **NOTE:** Pope Francis invites all Catholics to be missionary disciples. So all you St. Philip Prep Students and your teachers are missionary disciples.

Prayers of the Faithful (by students)

Final Reflection: There is an African proverb: *To be called is to be sent*. We are called to be disciples of Jesus Christ and then sent to be apostles/missionaries/evangelists.

Final Blessing

With the coming of Lent, 2024 SCC members have many opportunities for *Bible* resources -- both print and online. Our Ebook has many *Bible* resources in the “APPENDIX: 28 Online E-Resource Materials on the On-going Formation and Training of Small Christian Community (SCC) Leaders and Members.”

Very popular is *The Chosen*, a creative movie/video of the life of Jesus Christ. Dallas Jenkins, the director and main writer, says that he has given more depth to his scripts by adding backstories to various characters from the gospels without contradicting material that is present. Jenkins said he draws creative inspiration from TV shows like *Friday Night Lights* and *The Wire*.

Seven seasons of *The Chosen* are planned. Crowdsourcing is the main source of funding. How the movie is shot in Texas and Utah is fascinating. Filming for Season 3 included a four-day shoot for the scene of the feeding of the 5,000, using nearly 12,000 extras

from 36 countries. Most of the extras came at their own expense and made their own costumes.

Jonathan Roumie who plays Jesus said he always aims to "empty out as much of himself as possible" to allow the Holy Spirit to work in him through both the script and his performance on screen. In describing his preparation for the role, Roumie said that he does "a good bit of reading and rereading the source material" but that most of the preparation is "in the spiritual department."

The entirety of Season Four of *The Chosen* is being released in movie theaters starting on 1 February, 2024 with streaming available when the theatrical showings are complete. The theater releases will be in two-episode blocks with episodes 1-3 playing for two weeks, episodes 4-6 and 7-8 playing for one week each block.

In this Sunday's Gospel St. *Mark* writes: "Rising very early before dawn, Jesus left and went off to a deserted place where he prayed." The movie "The Chosen" shows Jesus sitting alone on his heels with hands outstretched. It is cold at night in Galilee so he sits before a small fire.

Zambia sets an example on celebrating the Golden Jubilee of SCCs in Eastern Africa: Okoth/Olweny, Jecinter, ZAMBIA: "Pivotal Role of Small Christian Communities in Evangelization," AMECEA Online News, Special Issue 500, 2 February, 2024, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 2 February, 2024,



COMMUNICATIONS.AMECEA.ORG

ZAMBIA: Pivotal Role of Small Christian Communities in Evangelization

By Sandra Kunda Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB) has underscored the pivotal roles Small Christian Communities (SCCs) have played in fostering a more evangelized and evangelizing Church, recognizing a notable surge in membership and heightened participation of the laity. In its pastoral....

From Brother Sixtus Roslevich, OSB, the Director of Oblates for Portsmouth Abbey, Rhode Island, USA.

"My introduction to the Manquehue Method of *lectio divina*, which they call "scrutinization," was as a lay oblate in October, 2001 in St. Louis, Missouri, USA the month after 9/11. We were led in prayer by two young men from Chile who bravely boarded a plane in Santiago, convinced that we needed their witness and brotherly support, despite air travel being at an all-time low after the tragedy. They changed many lives during that short visit. One takeaway I got from that initial fresh encounter with the Word of God is that *lectio* is not *Bible* study. There is a place for study of Scripture, as I know first-hand from my college buddy, Mike, an elder in his church in Raleigh, North Carolina. However, in *lectio*, our "echoes", or responses, arise from a deep place in the heart. In sharing an echo with a partner or with a group after a period of meditation, we speak in the first person. Our Chilean friends, in their "Weave of Manquehue

Prayer,” explain that this is meant “to help one another to pray, to cultivate spiritual friendship and to share with many the Good News of the Risen Christ.” “Lectio” is not an explanation, a speech or an impersonal reflection based on the readings. It is an opportunity to listen – not to respond, comment, or discuss another’s echo – for it is Christ who speaks to us through the echoes of other people.”

Good explanation of the meaning *lectio divina* ("divine reading").

During this Golden Jubilee Year, we can look forward to many celebrations and articles on SCCs. Father Wilbroad C. Musonda is a Diocesan Priest incardinated in Solwezi Diocese in Zambia. He writes: "I am part of the Diocesan Team with responsibility of Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) as Diocesan Director.

Today, 1 February, 2024, we are launching the 50th Golden Jubilee of the celebration of the establishment of SCCs in the AMECEA Region on the diocesan level here in Zambia. I write if you can kindly help me with the information on the Maryknoll Fathers and their role in the Pastoral Ministry in Solwezi Diocese in general and in particular their role in establishment of SCCs in the diocese.

Documents available to me show that they once worked in our diocese at St. Daniel Cathedral Parish. I will appreciate hearing from Father Joe Healey being the crusader of SCCs in the AMECEA Region. Your historical resume of SCCs in the AMECEA Region is highly appreciated and cherished by me and we thank God for that.

I look forward to hearing from you soon. Hence your quick input will help in the full information on the great role of Maryknoll in establishment of SCCs in Solwezi. Thanks so much.”

As we continue to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of SCCs in Eastern Africa it is important that we document the SCCs history in our respective countries and dioceses as this example from Zambia.

Bishop Charles Kasonde, the Bishop of Solwezi Diocese, Zambia and Chairperson of AMECEA, writes: "Indeed SCCs are a priority tool for evangelization. We are still celebrating the Golden Jubilee and I also declared 2024 as year for SCCs in my Diocese of Solwezi. To be able to sharpen this further, we have to do the SWOT Analysis and see how well we can improve on living together as church in the neighborhood. We need to continue living together as effective and efficient God’s instruments of hope, peace and love."

I responded: "This is great that you are using the SWOT analysis in Solwezi Diocese. I write about this method in four places in our Ebook. From the very beginning of the SCCs Pastoral Priority in the AMECEA countries in 1973 the AMECEA Bishops emphasized ongoing evaluation and assessment."

Evaluation is mentioned 215 times in our Ebook and assessment is mentioned 31 times.

A heads up to SCC members: One characteristic of being a Lectionary Based Faith Sharing Catholic is to choose a particular word or phrase or verse or an image from the daily readings, and especially the Sunday readings, -- called a *mantra* -- to use as a *Bible mantra* or *Gospel mantra* or prayer *mantra* or action verse during the day and during the week. Such a

particular word or phrase or verse from the *Gospel* of the following Sunday can nourish and sustain a person or a small community all day long and all during the week.

As an example in our Ebook *36 Bible* verses start with the letter P beginning from “passed from death to life” and going to “put out into deep water.”

For Sunday, 11 February, 2024 (Sixth Sunday of Ordinary Time, Year B -- *Mark* 1:40-45) my mantra is: “people kept coming to him from everywhere.”

Marie Venner reports: "In Zimbabwe, we (mainly the parish youth director) has organized five SCCs of young people, mainly still in school and university (Youth/Young Seeker/Affiliate focus), with support from those in their 30s, 40s, and 50s (me) as well as the parish priest -- see details below. We are also thinking about and planning formation this year. I wonder: might we as Maryknoll Affiliates support these Small Christian Communities of Catholic youth and their community projects as the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers have done with the Young Seekers/SCCs in Kenya and Tanzania? I am willing to do so.

Catholic Young Adults/Seekers in Chinamhora and Domboshava, Zimbabwe have wanted to join in Zoom meetings but electricity and internet access aren't adequate for this. We have used WhatsApp instead, so I have gotten on that and now spend the morning every day discussing planning, faith journeys and community action with the people there, also sharing about Maryknoll Affiliates. The Youth and Vocations Director and Advisor in these villages in Zimbabwe and I are in touch daily. Planning and organizing are going very well and the pastor is supportive too. Some leadership training has already occurred, and we are reading and planning together now for this year, including the MK Affiliates' four pillars and more on *Laudato Si'*.

Partnerships are a key way forward for us in Maryknoll and our long term viability, and we all agree youth are the future of our church and a very important present as well. Thus, I've also been reaching out to other potential partners, such as the Catholic Youth Network for Sustainability in Africa (CYNESA), as my connection to those leaders goes back nine years or so. We are reviving the CYNESA Chapter in Zimbabwe as we go, and this connection and interest is being taken up by the Small Christian Communities, mainly youth but support from those in their 20s (many youth and leaders and their Youth and Vocations Director, Liberty) 30s (Community Center Director and ag advisor, Taurai), 40s (Parish Youth Advisor, Tino), 50s (me), and the parish priest. Now the CYNESA country director, Southern Africa Director, and continental director are engaged as well. These are all volunteer positions except the parish priest. The pastor has been very supportive and leadership training has been offered, extending education around *Laudato Si'*.

How we can support and partner. Now these SCCs/Catholic youth groups have identified projects in Chinamhora and Domboshava, Zimbabwe starting with tree-planting as it is still the rainy season. The five 5 parish youth groups will also start a chicken project, to enhance food security, with the potential to become sustainable. The Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers made a \$6000 commitment to support youth/Young Seeker/SCC projects. I wonder if we might match them or come close, starting with a smaller amount this spring, to enable them to start on their projects, for which we'll put together an article for the *Maryknoll Magazine*. We will have more news later this spring as I plan to visit as many of the SCCs in Kenya in person as possible and all of those in Zimbabwe. I can share the budgets of projects and the details of all collaborating.

The "Synthesis Report" on the 2023 Synod states a "Preferential Option for Young People." A Search on our online Ebook on SCCs gives the following:

Young Seekers: 22 results
 Young Adults: 198 results
 Young People: 631 results

"Factors Affecting Young People Participation in Small Christian Communities: Insights from Interview Data Collected from Five Small Christian Communities at Virgin Mary Mother of our Savior Parish, Kipawa Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania"

By Jesca D. Massawe, BA of Social Work, and James Alex Mhangwa, BSc.EE

Abstract

The research examines the factors affecting youth participation in Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Kipawa Parish, Tanzania despite having a youthful population. There has been a decline in their engagement with SCCs. The study uses structured questionnaires to gather insights from participants in five specific SC Cs. The findings reveal that there is a significant gap between the perceived importance of SCCs.

This is the 16th article listed under "Tanzania" under "Africa. These are important research articles. Young people in Africa researching and writing about young people.

It is gratifying that responses about the newest version of our Ebook on SCCs have come from: Burkina Faso, Cameroun, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Germany, India, Italy, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Tanzania, Uganda, USA and Zambia. Amen. Alleluia.

We rarely have Swahili on this Facebook Page, but here is a poem about Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, one of the Bishop-Founders of SCCs in the AMECEA Region.

BUKIRIRO... INJILI YA 5

by Father Didas Kasusura

Injili ya Tano imetambulika, imefundishwa,
 Na kutangazwa hapa kwetu Bukiriro,
 Bukiriro ni jina zuri na tamu,
 Mahali pakuponea kuishi na kufurahia.
 Tega sikio usikie jinsi tulivyoponea hapa Bukiriro,
 Hayati Askofu Christopher Mwoleka,
 Akiongozwa na Roho wa Bwana kuishi,
 Maono na maelekezo ya Mtaguso wa Pili wa Vatikani,
 Aliacha yote Uaskofuni na kujitwika vilago vyake
 Kuishi Nyabihanga katika Kijiji cha Bukiriro.
 Lengo na nia kuishi maisha ya Jumuiya,
 Ndogondogo za Kikristu zenye ufanano,
 Zenye kulenga umoja, upendo na mshikamano,
 wa Jumuiya za kwanza za Kikristu,
 Wengi walitafsiri kwa furaha, ujasili na ukalimu huo,

Wengine, wengi walitafsiri visivyo wakizani ni woga,
na kukwepa majukumu ya kiaskofu Jimboni.
Wenye macho hawaambiwi tazama, wengi walifika,
Nyabihanga na Bukiriro wakimtafuta Askofu anayeishi,
Kijijini, walifurahi na kuthibitisha ukweli
kumuona aliyeishi, ujamaa na kujitegemea
Wa nje wakampa majina likiwemo jina la
“Askofu PekuPeku” kwa kizungu “Barefooted Bishop”
Siku si nyingi wamisionari, waandishi, na wachambuzi wa,
Maisha ya kanisa wakatililika mmoja kwa mwingine,
Kati yao akaja Padre Joseph Healey
(Maryknoll) aliomba kuishi naye hapo Kijijini Nyabihanga,
Wakisali kwa pamoja na wakristu na kuharakatika mashambani,
Wakilima viazi, mihogo, maharage na mahindi bila kusahau,
Kuitunza migomba na mifugo.
Padre Healey hakukawia kung’amua yakuwa Askofu, yeye
na wote walioishi maisha ya pamoja na umoja waliandika na
kuitangaza injili ya tano,
injili tunayoidawa sote kuiandika katika maisha yetu ya Kikristu,
injili nne zilizoandikwa na wafuasi wakristu Mathayo, Marko, Luka na Yohana,
ndiyo msingi na mwito wa kuiishi na kuitangaza injili ya tano,
Hongera Parokia ya Bukiriro kwa Kuishi na kutangaza kwenu Injili ya Tano.

We will post it on our SCCs Website with this "Introduction":

This Swahili poem – *Bukiriro... Injili ya Tano* (translated in English as *Bukiriro... A Fifth Gospel*) – is written by Father Didas Kasusura, a diocesan priest of Rulenge-Ngara Diocese in Western Tanzania. It is very timely as we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa (1973 – 2023). Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, then Bishop of Rulenge Diocese, Tanzania, was one of the Bishop-Founders of SCCs in the AMECEA Region. At that time he lived part time very close to the local people in Nyabihanga Village, a part of Bukiriro Outstation of Rulenge Parish. Now Bukiriro is a parish. As the poem narrates Mwoleka spearheaded the development of Small Christian Communities (*Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo za Kikristo* in Swahili). He built on the theology and practice of the Second Vatican Council. The term “A Fifth Gospel” has a long history with many books written about it. It is a valid metaphor in theology today. “Gospel” and “good news” can be applied to the way that God is revealing God through our human experience and daily lives. In light of the insights of the Story Theology/Theology of Story/Narrative Theology/Palaver Theology/Conversation Theology, our stories of faith are examples of Fifth Gospels. So the faith experience of the Christians of Bukiriro Parish today are a living Fifth Gospel.

See also the following books: Healey, Joseph, *A Fifth Gospel: The Experience of Back Christian Values*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books and London: SCM Press, 1981. A Special Edition (32 Years Anniversary Edition printed digitally) was published by Orbis Books in 2013. The Swahili version published by Benedictine Publications Ndanda-Peramiho, Peramiho is *Kuishi Injili (Living the Gospel)* and the German version published by Missio, Aachen is *Auf Der Suche Nach Dem Ganzen Leben: Kleine Christliche Gemeinschaften in Tansania*.

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RENEW International

Welcome to RENEW International, an organization dedicated to fostering faith formation and spiritual growth through small group experiences.

How can we SCC members be better lectionary based faith sharing Catholics during Lent 2024? Joan Chittister writes: “Like a great waterwheel, the Catholic Church's Liturgical Year goes on relentlessly irrigating our souls, softening the ground of our hearts, nourishing the soil of our lives until the seed of the Word of God itself begins to grow in us, comes to fruit in us, ripens us in the spiritual journey of a lifetime.”

There is a saying: *What goes around, comes around.* Caroline Adams, a long time member of our SCCs Team in the USA, writes: "Our SCC is still growing strong adding *Lectio Divina* to our scripture readings. More women in our group are taking active leadership roles in our Catholic Church and surrounding communities. It has been a blessing to experience their spiritual growth."

A question about the origin of our website encouraged us to look up the exact historical record with dates on page 254 in our Ebook:

https://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf

Turning over the “Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website” to the AMECEA Pastoral Department in Nairobi, Kenya on 1 January, 2021 challenged us to dig deeper to trace the origin of our website. The plan for the “Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website” was hatched during the National Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Convocation in San Antonio, Texas, USA in August, 2002. It officially began as the “Small Christian Communities in North America Collaborative Website” by RENEW International in its office in Plainfield, New Jersey, USA in 2004 under the coordination of Michael Brough, the Director of RENEW International with the domain name www.smallchristiancommunities.org.

The website was handed over from Terry Rickard, the Director of RENEW International, to Joseph Healey, the present Moderator of the website in 2008. From a continental website it became an international website with the name “Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website.” The transfer of the files and domain

name was complicated. First from RENEW International in Plainfield, New Jersey, USA to the Healey Development Office in Morristown, New Jersey, USA. Then from the Morristown office to the Urban Ministries Serving God (UMSG) Office and the Society for the International Ministries (SIM) Office in Nairobi, Kenya.

At that time the Webmaster Nicholas Adongo set up an independent website with a new name -- the "Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website." "Global" means it is international and worldwide. "Collaborative" means a wide variety and rich diversity of people share and work together to promote a SCC Model of Church.

I wonder how many people know this history? Full speed ahead.

"Dear Young Seekers SCC based in Nairobi, Kenya,

Our article "Clifton Students Help Young Kenyans Sow Seeds of Faith and Ecology with Tree-planting Project" has been published on page 6 of the 8 February, 2024 issue of "The Beacon" from Paterson Diocese, New Jersey, USA:
<https://evergreen.mydigitalpublication.com/publication/...>

Hongera. Pongezi."

Some feedback: "An inspiring article. The teamwork of the youth, yourself and the Patterson Diocese is to be admired. The spirit is leading you all well, and the young and all are responding with purposeful action." "Thanks for sharing this inspiring, beautiful article and the wonderful work you are doing. And thanks to the Patterson Diocese for their participation."

May we SCC members join with Cardinal Robert McElroy, the Bishop of San Diego Diocese, California, USA as he writes: "Let us pray and work together for the success and deepening of the synodal process in the grace of the Holy Spirit."

As I said today on WhatsApp to Alloys Nyakundi, the coordinator of the Young People Seekers Small Christian Community based in Nairobi, Kenya... For many years I have taught journalism and writing in Eastern Africa. I am using this new article in *The Beacon*:

"Clifton Students Help Young Kenyans Sow Seeds of Faith and Ecology with Tree-planting Project
<https://evergreen.mydigitalpublication.com/publication/...>

as a model of good journalism/good writing for these reasons:

- Clear, informative headline.
- Creative link between faith and ecology.
- Colorful photo and clear caption.
- Lot of facts about Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and Africa.
- Includes the Mission Office of Paterson Diocese and the Synod on Synodality.
- Quote from a 7th Grader.
- Quote from the Principal of the school.
- Quote from a member of the Young People Seekers Small Christian Community.

- Link to SCCs Website.

EVERGREEN.MYDIGITALPUBLICATION.COM

The Beacon February 8 2024 Page 6

Maryknoll sponsored:

"Lenten Liberation: Transformed To Create A Just World"
Lenten Lunch Reflections

Come nourish your body and spirit with us during Lent. Every Wednesday, starting on Ash Wednesday at 12-12:30 (EDT) during Lent, we will gather for 30 minutes to reflect and share on the scriptural readings for that coming Sunday. Join us for this spiritual journey.

This FREE half hour Zoom gathering will help carry you through the 40 days of Lent. We will meet on the following dates:

February 14, February 21, February 28, March 6, March 13, March 20, and March 27
9am PT | 10am MT | 11am CT | 12PM ET

Join our meeting using the Zoom Link:

<https://maryknoll.zoom.us/j/3766002533>

If you have any questions, please contact us.

Kevin McCarthy - 914-559-2651

kmccarthy@maryknoll.org

MARYKNOLL.ZOOM.US

Join our Cloud HD Video Meeting

A very good example of communal Lectionary based Faith Sharing. This Lenten Series combines the best elements of the SCCs Model and the Synodal Model. After an Introduction and the reading of the Gospel of the following Sunday, participants go into breakout groups of four people each to answer two questions.

“We have begun working on a New Edition of Michael Cowan and Bernard Lee, *Conversation, Risk, and Conversion: The Inner & Public Life of Small Christian Communities* published by Orbis Books at Maryknoll, NY in 1997. Prayers please.

This book has had a big influence on the development of SCCs worldwide. It is used as a textbook (sent as an electronic copy to students throughout the world) in two Online LIM Courses at the University of Loyola in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA: the “Inner Life of Small Christian Communities” and the “Public Life of Small Christian Communities.”

It will be interested to see what changes have occurred during this 1997 to 2024 period.”

“It is important that SCCs members in Eastern Africa listen deeply and carefully to the experience and language of SCC members in other parts of the world. For example, here are the words of a committed Catholic in the USA on the Synodal Process: "We want to see obligatory parish councils representative of the entire community, the establishment of small groups within parishes to listen to one another in a synodal way and identify the issues of primary concern locally, that will then lead to finding solutions."

NEW POST ANNOUNCEMENT: *Introduction - BukiriroInjili ya 5*

This Swahili poem – *Bukiriro...Injili ya 5* (translated in English as *Bukiriro...A Fifth Gospel*) – is written by Father Didas Kasusura, a diocesan priest of Rulenge-Ngara Diocese in Western Tanzania. It is very timely as we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa (1973 – 2023). Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, then Bishop of Rulenge Diocese, Tanzania, was one of the Bishop-Founders of SCCs in the AMECEA Region. At the time he lived part time very close to the local people in Nyabihanga Village, a part of.....Read More>>>



SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

Introduction – BukiriroInjili ya 5 – Small Christian Communities
Small Christian Communities

It is important that we remember and celebrate the history of SCCs in Eastern Africa. Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, then Bishop of Rulenge Diocese, Tanzania, was one of the Bishop-Founders of SCCs in the AMECEA Region and had a great vision of this new way of being church. Now SCCs are recognized all around the world.

Some comments on our SCC Facebook Page:

1. Meeting our brothers and sisters on the streets of the world" is a powerful image.
2. Enter "Lent" in the Search Box: 66 results found for: Lent.
3. The term "Small Groups" is more common in the USA.

From
Joseph Sekiku
Director
FADECO COMMUNITY RADIO
Sawaka str/ FADECO Road Jnctn
P. O . Box 223
35402 KARAGWE- Kagera Region
Tanzania
Tel: +255 754 605682
Tel: +255 783 437395
Email: sekiku@fadeco.co.tz

Greetings. I am called Joseph Sekiku, the Director of FADECO COMMUNITY RADIO. This is a secular/development radio station but operated by us who are Catholic Christians. We take this as an opportunity for some of us LAY PERSONS to participate in the work of evangelization.

Ahead of the 50 years jubilee celebrations of SCCs, We (the management of FADECO COMMUNITY RADIO) have decided that we allocate AIRSPACE for broadcasts/content about Small Christian Communities/Basic Christian Communities and its

forerunners. I personally am trying to do what I am calling RE-DISCOVERING or retelling the spirituality of the one Late Bishop Christopher Mwoleka.

With this short background, I would like to avail this broadcast opportunity to anyone within the AMECEA Region who can provide content (BEST IN KISWAHILI or English) to send it to us; and to provide the permission to broadcast the material.

May we SCC members participate in:

In the 2024 Lenten Campaign message, Catholic Bishops in Kenya invite Catholics in the country to pray for the ongoing Synod on Synodality that Pope Francis extended to 2024. "We are, therefore, invited to continue praying for this process of Synodality to be a moment of conversion towards making our Church Christ-centered in what we do and in whom we are as children of God," KCCB members say.

Do we realize how much free material is online? Enter "Lent" in the Search Box of our free Ebook on "SCCs in Africa:" 66 results are found for Lent.

Are you searching for a Lenten promise that can help you grow in faith and strengthen your relationship with God? Explore RENEW's collection of resources for Lent 2024 that can guide you on a faith-filled journey to the miracle of Easter.

store.renewintl.org/collections/lent-2024

Check out in particular the Lenten booklet "Open Our Hearts."



Sign up today to join us for our FREE virtual faith-sharing sessions during Lent! Offered in English, Spanish, and Haitian-Creole, they're the perfect way to embark on a faith journey this season. Register today or learn more at renewintl.org/events



The *National Catholic Register* (NCR) published a two part series by Peter Jesserer Smith on

"Small Is Beautiful: How Catholic Faith Comes Alive in Small Parishes" (June 18, 2020)

<https://www.ncregister.com/news/small-is-beautiful-how-catholic-faith-comes-alive-in-small-parishes>

"Small Is Beautiful: How Small Groups Can Transform Large Parishes" (June 21, 2020).

<https://www.ncregister.com/news/small-is-beautiful-how-small-groups-can-transform-large-parishes>

These articles describe very well the Small Group Model of Church popular in the United States. This is different from the Small Christian Community Model of Church popular in Eastern Africa.



The Catholic Church in the U.S. is ‘super-sizing’ its parishes, but small parishes have some critical advantages in passing on the Catholic faith.

One of the three goals/purposes of Lent 2024 is prayer. May our SCC members pray for and with those involved in the ongoing Synodal Process. Here is what the Catholic Diocese of Paterson in the state of New Jersey in USA is doing:

Dear Synodal Delegates and Participants:

We hope you have been keeping abreast of the progress of the Synod on Synodality, which began with our diocesan phase in 2021-22, and has now moved through the regional, national and continental phases, culminating with the first assembly of the Synod in October 2023.

As the Synod of Bishops in Rome begins to process the results of its assembly last October and to prepare for its next assembly in October 2024, dioceses have been asked to participate in an “interim phase” of the Synod on Synodality during this coming Lent. Specifically, the Secretariat of the Synod has asked for further consultation with the People of God through local listening sessions.

In order to encourage broad participation, our synod team will facilitate one session in each of our three counties and each session will have an option for participation in English or Spanish. These sessions will be open to any person who wishes to participate, and will occur as follows:

- Wednesday, March 13th, at Reverend Brown School in Sparta, from 7:00-9:00 pm
- Monday, March 18th, at Pope John Paul II School in Clifton, from 7:00-9:00 pm
- Saturday, March 23rd, at St. Paul Inside the Walls in Madison, from 9:30-11:00 am.

You can register for any of the three sessions by clicking here.

<https://rcdop.org/synod-interim-listening-session...>

Upon registering, you will be asked to invite other participants whose voices may not have been heard or included in prior listening sessions. They will need to register for a session as well. Please share the link with them.

The purpose of this interim phase is to promote deeper reflection on how to grow as a Synodal Church universally and to broaden the experience of listening and discerning together at the local level. We only have a brief time to participate in this interim phase, so we encourage your response.

Sincerely,

Maria Moncaleano, Director of Hispanic Ministry, and Fr. Paul S. Manning, Vicar for Evangelization

Diocesan Synodal Contacts

At a meeting of the AMECEA Executive Board in Nairobi, Kenya on 8 February, 2024 Father Andrew Kaufa, the coordinator for Social Communications Department at the AMECEA Secretariat shared how the region can be a more Synodal Church in mission. Fr. Kaufa a member of the Missionaries of the Company of Mary (SMM) who doubles as a consultant to the Dicastery for Communication at the Vatican, underscored some ways the

bishops can journey together with their priests, religious, and the laity saying, “the region can strengthen the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) which are already recognized by the Synod as an appropriate ecclesial model in the Synodal Church.” He added at the same time, “evaluate and strengthen the effectiveness of the existing participative structures that encourage dialogue, consultation, common discernment and collaboration with Church Councils, Parish Councils and Diocesan Council of Consulters.”

One of the three goals/purposes of Lent 2024 is prayer. May our SCC members pray for and with those involved in the second session of the 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod which will take place in Rome from Wednesday, October 2 to Sunday, October 27, 2024. The session will continue the work of the Synod on synodality on the theme "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission."

In Swahili well put: *ushirika, ushiriki na umisionari. Plus kisinodi, kijumuiya na kusafiri kwa pamoja.*

In our ongoing research on SCCs, a lay SCC leader in Florida, USA points out that American Catholics are "intimidated" by the commitment to the specific Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church with its clear characteristics/criteria that is different from the Small Group Model of Church. Some reasons:

- **Weekly, communal Lectionary-based Faith Sharing (both personal and communal)**

Limited Time: General busyness and overextension in American Catholic families. American Catholics’ commitment to immediate family activities/events over other types of communities/groups. Seasonal SCCs such as in Advent and Lent, but not weekly year round SCCs.

Many middle class American Catholics are very private and individualistic. They are not willing to be vulnerable and share their lives and their faith at a deeper level. They shy away from a commitment to a deeper synodal style of life, a synodal way of life – a walking together.

- **Neighborhood-based (geographical and family oriented)**

SCC members in America are mainly adults who live physically a part/in a scattered geographical area.

- **Practical Action/Outreach**

Simple Prayer Groups that don’t want to include general outreach.

Further comments are welcome:

1. “Our SCCs in Eastern Africa are family oriented.”
2. “Not just American Catholics but most American church members have this problem it seems. We have a very hard time embracing Jesus and be declared a disciple which requires a commitment to Him, your neighborhood and community and sharing your faith.

Good insight. Missionary discipleship required a commitment to a synodal style of life, a synodal way of life -- walking together in Christ.

3. I'm interested in this criticism but need more context. What's the intimidating part? I never heard the phrase "faith sharing group" until I met some American Catholics.

Our research shows that many Americans are very private and individualistic. They don't like the openness and vulnerability of faith sharing/sharing their faith publicly with others.

As we SCC members "walk together" (the meaning of "synod") during our 40 day Lenten journey, let us maintain the discipline to deny ourselves and to take up our cross daily. We are both invited and challenged every single day—not just when we feel inspired or when everyone else is doing it. We must persist with constancy, even if we fell short of expectations the previous day.

Our current research show that the expressions "Synodality" and the "Synodal Process" have a negative ring to those parishioners who feel that rightsizing, clustering and "family parishes" (for example, Seattle Archdiocese, Washington, USA) are being forced upon them without sufficient consultation and dialog.

Please note that together with the Kenya Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community, I prepared the Gospel Reflection for this 2nd Sunday in Lent (25 February, 2024) for the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns in Washington DC, USA as follows: <https://www.maryknollogc.org/files/attachments/lent-2024.pdf>



On the care of creation, Catholic Young People in Kenya are not just talking the talk; they are walking the walk. They are planting trees by the thousands. Collins Ngoma, a member of the Kenya Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community, reports:

“The youth from St. Martin of Tours Parish in Sultan Hamud in Ngong Diocese, Kenya had a seminar on the importance of caring for Mother Nature. Immediately after the session, we planted trees in the compound. I was amazed when the Pontifical Missionary Childhood Society, the facilitators, and our priest joined the initiative. Next, we went to two of Sultan Hamud Parish’s outstations—St. Antony,

Emali, and St. Mary, Masimba—that received their fair share of tree seedlings.”

When it comes to climate change and global warming, the people living in Africa are very vulnerable. Kenya is on the equator. Countries in Eastern Africa are presently alternating between terrible drought and excessive flooding, resulting in mud slides.

Sacrifice is an important theme of the Lenten Season and of the scripture readings this Second Sunday in Lent. Jesus Christ makes the ultimate sacrifice of suffering and dying for humankind. In the Gospel, Jesus tells Peter, James, and John “not to relate what they had seen [in the Transfiguration] to anyone until the Son of Man had risen from the dead.” In the first reading, Abraham shows his deep faith in God by being willing to sacrifice his beloved son Issac.

What sacrifices are we willing to make during this Lenten Season?

Sacrifice is essential if we are to truly care for creation and emphasize the importance of ecology and the environment. Are we willing to make sacrifices in our lifestyle and convert to simple living? Are we willing to reduce our carbon footprint by driving gasoline cars less often and flying by planes less frequently? Are we actively engaged in advocacy for moving away from fossil fuels?

World leaders have recently returned from COP28, the UN Climate Change Summit in Dubai in December, 2023. Pope Francis said to the participants: “Let us choose life. Let us choose the future. May we be attentive to the cry of the earth, may we hear the plea of the poor.”

As a takeaway, read *Laudate Deum*, Pope Francis’ Apostolic Letter on humanity’s obligations to the environment issued in October, 2023 and act on it – both individually and in a communal way (in a synodal way).

And lastly, consider the proverb popular in Kenya: *You must treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It is loaned to you by your children.* Then teach a child the importance of the care of creation.

-- by Father Joseph Healey, MM

Questions for Reflection:

What sacrifice do you feel called to make this Lenten season to better care for creation?

What is one way you can teach children the importance of care for creation?

Thanks so very much *Mwanajumiya* Joe for always promoting the Young Seekers activities on the care of the earth. This is a practical example of how our small actions can transform the world to be a better place.

It was nice to share the tree planting activities of Collins and his friends in Ngong Diocese, Kenya with the rest of the world.”

Yes, and let us give specific examples of these small actions:

- Turning off lights.
- Not using single use plastics.
- Cleaning up plastic waste.
- Making compost.

Please add your own examples.

Dodson, Laura, “Can Small Christian Communities Help Heal a ‘Eucharistic Famine’? This Maryknoll Priest Thinks So.” “This type of community can lead to great Eucharistic devotion.” *OSV News*, 19 February, 2024, Our Sunday Visitor (OSV) Website, retrieved on 20 February, 2024, <https://www.oursundayvisitor.com/can-small-christian.../>

Published in 15 places:

Catholic Nutshell News

Central Minnesota Catholic Magazine

Florida Catholic Media (plus audio, plus Spanish)

Florida Catholic Website

Microsoft Bing Summary

New Outlook: Diocese of Tucson Online News (plus Spanish)

Orbis Books Facebook Page

Orbis Books Instagram Page

Orbis Books Twitter Page

Our Sunday Visitor

Our Sunday Visitor Twitter (X) Page

OSV Page with new devotional headline

St. Brigid & St. James Knights of Columbus 16179 (devotional headline)

Sticna (devotional)

We are Church Ireland

Born in Detroit in 1938, Father Healey was ordained a priest for the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers in 1966 and spent more than 50 years in East Africa, predominantly focused on forming what are called “Small Christian Communities,” or SCCs. Having formed several thousand — in person and over the internet — he is sought out as an expert in what it means to answer Jesus’ call as a disciple and to be sent forth as an apostle.

Now back in the U.S., he passionately continues to spread the essential role of SCCs in the church’s evangelizing mission. SCCs (also known as “Basic Christian Communities”) have also gained the attention of the global Synod of Bishops, which will continue discerning how they can become a more intentional part of a synodal, evangelizing church when the synod reconvenes in Rome this October.

Father Healey hopes the July 17-21 National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis will include the opportunity for participants to gather in small groups to share their faith, to discuss what the Eucharist means to them and the community. “There is a Eucharistic famine in Africa,” he explained, “where many communities will go for as long as a year without a priest to celebrate Mass. The pinnacle of our Catholic faith is absent.”



OURSUNDAYVISITOR.COM

[Can small Christian communities help heal a 'Eucharistic famine'? This Maryknoll priest thinks so](#)

Valerie Stroud writes from England:

"Hello Laura,

An excellent article. The theory of SCCs is one thing, actually being part of one is the reality and a real blessing. I particularly liked this paragraph which is very true:

Once again, the SCC format is simple: A small gathering of people meet weekly usually in homes for a couple of hours to listen to the Sunday readings, share what they hear God saying to them and commit to acting upon it. They pray, share life and then when they bring it all to Sunday

Mass and Eucharist, their relationships with one another, the larger community and Our Lord deepen and are more meaningful.

Our SCC, which meets via Zoom once a week, includes companions from all over England, a couple in the USA and one in Australia. We enrich each other in so many ways. One thing I have noticed over the 18 months we have been together is that some members, who had been hurt by the institutional Church and reluctant to return to Mass, are now either participating in their local parish or online where the celebration and preaching are spiritually nourishing. With the solid support of a SCC behind them others have ventured to promote initiatives, like *Laudato Si'*, to their Parish Priests and parishes. One is exploring the possibility of getting a SCC together in her parish.

I don't think it likely to happen as our English and Welsh hierarchy seem hell bent on running the institution into the ground by clumping parishes together and moving the spiritual center further and further from the people, but the promotion of SCCs, I believe, would be far more constructive, beneficial, and solve much of the problem with diminishing numbers of clergy. However, that takes foresight and a degree of humility on the part of the Ordained. There is a need to appreciate that the people are able to help themselves spiritually and there is no need for everything to focus on one man. We focus on Jesus the Christ instead. For the most part the more responsibility given to people the more they will respond and appreciate the leadership. Valerie, many thanks for this powerful witness statement of your own SCC experience."

I am posting your message on our SCCs Facebook Page <https://smallchristiancommunities.org> to encourage people both inside and outside our Catholic Parishes to start and/or to strengthen SCCs whether they are:

- in person.
- online.
- hybrid.

May the Holy Spirit guide us.



SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

Small Christian Communities

[Small Christian Communities](https://smallchristiancommunities.org)

The article states:

There are Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the USA of many different configurations based on something people share in common: such as young moms groups, married couple groups, youth groups, or even by profession, such as groups of nurses or athletes. *The Chosen* TV drama about the life of Jesus has also generated many small groups. And sometimes, the group's commonality might also be the simple desire to be more than a Sunday Catholic.

I belong to a *The Chosen* Small Group at Christ the King Parish in New Vernon, New Jersey, USA. We watch episodes of *The Chosen* in the parish hall and then reflect on them together. I use the best episodes of *The Chosen* as part of the shared homily in Zoom Masses.

Laurel writes that the Global Synod of Bishops that reconvenes in Rome this October, 2024 will continue to discern how SCCs can become a more intentional part of a synodal, evangelizing church. Let us hope that the revisions in *Canon Law* presently going on will recognize the Local Church in Africa – sub-parishes, outstations, SCCs, etc. Right now there is nothing below “the parish as the basic juridical unit.”

May our SCC members pray for and with Sister Nathalie Becquart as she travels in the USA sharing her experience and the significance of Session One of the Synod on Synodality and preparation for Session Two.

May Americans understand the value of the Small Christian Community (SCC) Model of Church and promote it in their parishes.

SCC members know well the Spanish proverb *we create the path by walking*. Starting from many different sources we hope there is a surge of new SCCs in the USA. We hope that parishioners who have Lent and Easter Season SCCs decide for a permanent weekly SCC year round. During the summer months they can have an Online SCC since they are enjoying summer vacations at different physical locations.

From Ron McCollum: “I am a great believer in small SCC groups and have been in several throughout my life. Many have been really good and others just another meeting I attended because they were my friends. From my experience, groups that have a purpose outside of themselves, like being missional in some way seem to do better than those that become just a small church meeting done in a home. Just an observation I have noticed over the years.”

“Thanks for this helpful comment, Ron. This is the value of this Facebook Page being a Forum. From an Eastern Africa perspective may I comment on your statement: "just a small church meeting done in a home." 1. We use the expression "gathering" rather than "meeting" because it is not agenda-driven but discernment in the Holy Spirit. 2. The "Local Church in the neighborhood" is an important dimension of our SCCs Model of Church. 3. One of our two key pillars is practical action/outreach. This has a mission spirit.”

Perhaps the next activities and projects of the Young Seekers can focus on not using single use plastics and cleaning up plastic waste. Abel Nagaya writes: “Sounds great...environmental wellness.”

From Mary Wahome: “Talk of African Sunday 4 February Kenyatta University Catholic Chaplaincy celebrated their annual African Sunday with this year's theme being celebrating “African Unity in Christ.” Every SCC was required to present a traditional song and St. Dominic SCC presented a traditional Kamba love song with the theme of love. They were so creative that they dressed in traditional Kamba attires and made paintings on their bodies. Their day was graced even more when Mr. KUCC African Sunday emerged from their SCC. Their joy and happiness could not be hidden as they were smiling all over. Finally, victory was home. St. Dominic, my SCC of choice. Long live the undying spirit of the Dominicans.”

“The Judgment of São Miguel: A Catholic Priest, an Evangelical Pastor and the Battle for Souls in the Deepest Amazon”

Story by Terrence McCoy

Photos by Alexandre Cruz-Noronha

Videos by Deyse Cruz

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/.../brazil-amazon-catholic...>

This is a dramatic story about the challenge of the Eucharistic Famine in Brazil. The parish priest visits the 88 small separate communities/river villages along Purus River in the deepest Amazon Forest only once a year for Mass and the sacraments. Now Brazilian Evangelical Protestant pastors are living full time in these communities/villages and are winning over many Catholics. There is a marked retreat of Catholicism across Latin America, where Evangelical Protestants are increasingly challenging its historic dominance.



[WASHINGTONPOST.COM](https://www.washingtonpost.com)

[The judgment of São Miguel](#)

[A Catholic priest, an evangelical pastor and the battle for souls in the](#)

Bishop Fritz Lobinger describes remote villages in the dioceses in the northern part of South Africa where the male celebrate priest only visits once a year. All the sacraments take place on that day. Our Ebook describes Lobinger’s vision of married priesthood as a practical, pastoral solution to the Eucharistic Famine. Years ago Lobinger showed me an official letter in German from the Vatican signed by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Doctrine of the Faith, informing him that he is not allowed to discuss married priesthood. Wow, times have changed.

May the Holy Spirit will guide the Synod delegates in Rome in October, 2024 to approve married priests in places where there is a Eucharistic Famine – as now recommended by the Belgium bishops and others.

“Last year 2023, the AMECEA’s Promoting Integral Human Development (PIHD) Department began an awareness campaign on *Laudato Si* implementation guidelines in Eastern Africa to help strategize how the guidelines can be spoken about and understood in dioceses, parishes and various groups in the church including Small Christian Communities (SCCs).”

As we come to the end of this month of February, 2024 you are invited to vote in our SCCs Poll at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/> The results give a profile of the priorities and interests of our SCC members.



SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

Small Christian Communities

Small Christian Communities, eastern africa, church

Many ordinary SCC members vote for "structure of fraternity and support." They find friendship and solidarity in the life and activities of their SCC. They receive support and encouragement for their personal lives and their families.

Our Ebook documents in great length the SCC Model of Church in Eastern Africa where we have 195,000 SCCs. SCCs are not a program or project in the parish and in general society. They are a way of life.

We are now researching how SCCs can evolve in the USA in a new way in our local USA context. There are 31 Programs and organizations that are the sources of (ideally) weekly Small Christian Communities (in person, online, hybrid) ranging alphabetically from ACTS to University/College Alumni Programs. The online SCCs are on many social media (alphabetically): Google Meets, Microsoft Team, Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom.

From Ron McCollum: "On the statement: 'SCCs are not a program or project in the parish and in general society. They are a way of life.' This is how the early church made such an impact in the world for Christ. Ordinary people, in small groups, caring for one another and doing great things for their Lord Jesus as they were led and empowered by the Spirit. May we return to that is my prayer. So glad research is being done to bring this model into the USA."

Chapters Two and Four of the *Acts of the Apostles* describes very well the life and the activities of the SCCs in the first century. Yes, can we return to this spirit and practice in the 21st Century?

How can this SCC Model of Church work in a new way in our local USA context? We begin by identifying 32 Programs and organizations that are the sources of (ideally) weekly Small Christian Communities (in person, online, hybrid) ranging alphabetically:

ACTS

ALPHA

Campus Ministry Programs

Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI)

Catholic Parish Ministries (young moms groups, married couple groups, youth groups, etc. or even by profession, such as groups of nurses or athletes)

Center at Mariandale

"The Chosen" Small Groups

Christian Life Communities (CLCs)

Cornerstone
 Cursillo
 Disenchantment/Discouragement with the Institutional Catholic Church and One's Local Catholic Parish
 Dynamic Catholic (the successor to Christ Renews His Parish)
 ESTEEM
 Eucharistic Congress
 Evangelical Catholic
 Faith Circles
 FOCUS
 FutureChurch
 Intentional Eucharistic Communities (IECs)
 JustFaith
 Lectio Divina
 Listening Sessions in the ongoing Synodal Process
 Maryknoll Programs (Maryknoll Affiliates, Lenten Luncheon Reflections, Missionary Discipleship, Young Adult Empowerment Cohorts, Sal y Luz (Salt and Light), etc. English and Spanish.
 North American Forum for Small Christian Communities (NAFSCC)
 Presentation Ministries
 Rebuilt (based on the Rick Warren model)
 RENEW International
 Retreat Center/Renewal Centers
 Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)
 St. Paul Outreach
 Today's American Catholic
 University/College Alumni Programs

As we continue to research and write about the theological underpinning of the Synod topic "Eucharistic Famine," books are very important such as:

Oluwadare Michael, *Eucharistic Deprivation in the Western Part of Nigeria: Toward an Inculturated Theology and Celebration of the Eucharist*, Unpublished Licentiate Thesis, San Francisco: Santa Clara University, 2022.

One of the challenges confronting the Catholic Church worldwide is the shortage of priests. Because of this, many parishes, especially in the rural areas, gather for Sunday worship without the Eucharist. This thesis will explore the rural areas in the western part of Nigeria [in West Africa] that are faced with the problem of the shortage of priests, economic instability, lack of basic amenities and poverty. Due to this, the people in this part of the country feel deprived, isolated, and marginalized. The thesis will propose a commission of lay ministers to preside at the Communion Service, Liturgies of the Word, and sacramental preparation in the absence of a priest.

Therefore, the thesis uses constructive narrative criticism. This method is personal based on my experiences in rural western Nigeria [in West Africa] . It will narrate the situation of the Catholic faithful living in the rural and urban settings, and from this perspective, a model of Sunday Celebration will be introduced. An example of such a model is gathering the assembly with a lay presider who shares the Word in the absence of a priest. The presence of lay ministers in the rural Church will bridge the disparity between rural and urban settings. That way the communities continue to see one another as the People of God.

This Model of Lay Ministers/Lay Presiders already exists in Eastern and Southern Africa where catechists and other lay leaders such as an installed Catholic school teacher preside at the "Sunday Service Without a Priest" (*Ibada Bila Padri* in Swahili). Where there is a permanent tabernacle the Presider can give out previously consecrated hosts. The catechist can carry consecrated hosts from the parish church to the outstation church. It is preferred that the bishop preside at a liturgical event installing these Eucharistic Ministers.

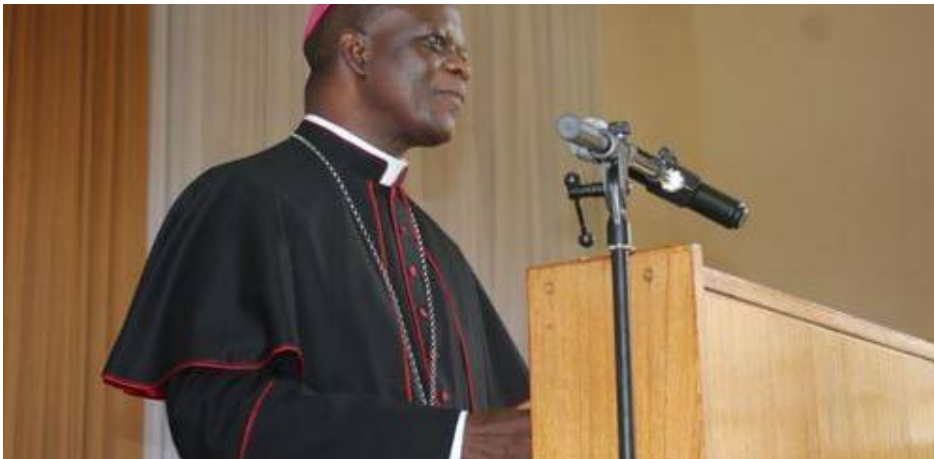
As we continue our research, here are some expressions being used (alphabetically): Eucharistic Deprivation, Eucharistic Desert, Eucharistic Drought, Eucharistic Famine, Eucharistic Hunger and Eucharistic Starvation.

ACI Africa Staff, "Training of Small Christian Community Leaders among AMECEA 'Pastoral Strategies: Official,'" *ACI Africa Online News Service*, 25 February, 2024, ACI Africa Website, retrieved on 26 February, 2024, https://www.aciafrica.org/news/10339/training-of-small-christian-community-leaders-among-amecea-pastoral-strategies-official?utm_campaign=ACI%20Africa&utm_medium=email&_hsmt=295633774&_hsenc=p2ANqtz--iDYhwrcpToe8fLrfTxQQFq2veZvPQelxjpl-iPKahtGHRiJVYXEbPQnW61OC_uLtee2Ng2y0SV3eHE-GuGuwG-LAg&utm_content=295633774&utm_source=hs_email

Capacity building initiatives targeting animators of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is one of the strategies that members of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) have identified in their effort to realize "deeper evangelization" in the region, an official of the nine-nation association has said.

The pastoral strategy, Archbishop Muhatia said, "specifically targets the formation of Small Christian Community (SCC) leaders, animators, facilitators, or coordinators in a deeper evangelization that integrates African values and Christian values."

Last August, AMECEA launched the Golden Jubilee Year of SCCs to assess the status of this new way of being church that the leadership of the Church in Africa has included in its evangelization structures. For the whole year, starting from the 19 August 2023 launch, the nine countries in the AMECEA region are to reflect on the goals that Catholic Bishops in the region had when they founded SCCs in 1973.



Training of Small Christian Community Leaders among AMECEA “pastoral strategies”: Official

At the 2024 Catholic Partnership Summit is presently taking place in Arlington, Virginia, USA on the theme "Expanding the Tent: Young Adult Leadership and Co-Responsibility in the Catholic Church." We were especially blessed to have 75 Catholic Young Adults actively participating. At the end of the first day at my small table one conclusion was: "Create online/virtual/digital spaces to connect to Young Adults in the USA." This recalls one choice in our SCCs Poll this month: "Basic space where I live my faith."

At the 2024 Catholic Partnership Summit part of our prayer was to reflect on “A Prayer for Renewed Encounter,” an Advent candle wax, colored pencil watercolor on paper mounted on a panel by artist Casey Murano. I first saw many pizzas and donuts. Then I saw the Small Christian Community (SCCs) Model of Church in Eastern Africa – a Catholic Parish with four outstations each containing different sized SCCs. There was a cross in the middle. Then I saw the roundtables of the delegates at the Synod in Rome in October, 2023.

From the St. John XXIII Catholic Church Website (<https://johnxxiii.net>) -- Fort Myers, Florida, USA (Venice Diocese). This is a good description of the Small Group Model of Church:

Small groups are the backbone of a healthy and thriving Catholic Church. At St. John XXIII, we like to think of ourselves that way. On more than one occasion from the pulpit, Father Bob describes the Church as the “triage hospital on the battlefield of life.” The small group is not just a pleasant addition to our church, but a necessity for the spiritual health of its members. Without small groups, any ministry will be limited to what just a handful of leaders can accomplish by themselves.

There is great wisdom in the people of our small groups. We can’t (and shouldn’t) depend solely on our priests for the love and direction we need. Small groups can help prevent what has been called the “Sunday-Only” culture of our faith. We can’t simply sit and listen only on Sunday – faith is an active, all-week way of life. The opportunities to grow closer to God happen daily, and we need other people to help us see them.

Small groups can provide a sense of family for many whose biological family lives far away. Unlike generations past, it is increasingly more common for adults to find themselves living far away from their biological family. Add the growing number of broken homes and dysfunctional families and you have a snapshot of the 21st century. The right kind of small group can play a vital role in providing a sense of family.

But small groups are the best place to meet new people, care for others and be cared for yourself. The idea that we can grow spiritually while isolating ourselves is insanity. Getting and giving direction based on spiritual principles must be done in dialogue with our fellows. In our childish minds, the myth of the ascetic visiting a mountaintop to absorb divine wisdom must be dispelled. That’s not you. We belong in community with others.

Some examples.

1. The Men's Gospel Forum started back in 2008 when we were still Blessed John the 23rd. We actually still meet every Monday morning at 7:00 am to discuss this week's upcoming Gospel."
2. "Opening the Word:" Reflecting on the Gospel of the Following Sunday. Hybrid: meets on Zoom and in the Parish Life Center (PLC). 9 am on Tuesday Mornings.
3. Blaze Bible Study: Parish Life Center (PLC). 7:30 pm on Wednesdays.

The parish has Compassionate Ministries, Outreach Ministries and Devotional Ministries.

Here are some examples in the parish. These Small Groups can stand on their own. Some times they are Devotional Groups. Sometimes they are part of ministries in the parish:

Adoration Chapel Ministry
 Adult Choir
 Alcohol Anonymous (AA)
 Beloved Young Women Bible Study
 Bereavement
 Blaze Bible Study
 Catholic Grandparents Association
The Chosen
 Craftie Ladies
 Divorce and Separation Support Group
 Eucharistic Outreach Ministry
 Hispanic Charismatic Prayer Group
 Faith & Ale (Catholic Men)
 Faith & Wine Lee County (Catholic Women)
 Funeral Ministry
 High School Youth Group
 Hispanic Charismatic Prayer Group
 Journey to Hope
 Knights of Coumbus
 The Melchizedek Project
 Men's Gospel Forum
 Middle School Youth Group
 Opening the Word (Gospel Reflection)
 Praise and Worship Ministry
 Respect Life Ministry
 Rite for Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)
 Rooted Ministries (for Youth and Young Adults)
 Rosary Group Ministry
 65 & Over Singles Sunday Brunch
 St. Martin De Porres (SMDP) Outreach
 Teams of Our Lady (TOOL)
 Vietnamese Choir
 Women's Guild

Small Communities emerge from reading the contemporary "signs of the times. "Eco-Warriors" was founded last year at Loyola University Chicago, Illinois, USA specifically to

address climate anxiety among students, especially those in the School of Environmental Sustainability. Jesuit Brother Mark Mackey, SJ heard students in his eco-spirituality course talk about feeling overwhelmed, not being able to get out of bed or deciding against having children because of their fears about the climate crisis.

So he gathered some students together for weekly meetings. "It helps just hearing that you're not alone in these worries and having a place to vent and get out your frustrations," Mackey told EarthBeat. "Now in its second year, the group's success is evident from student interest. It has attracted nearly 30 people and would likely appeal to more, but Mackey does not advertise in an effort to maintain the small group feel.

At the group's first meeting, Mackey wrote "Eco-Worriers" on the board, only to have a student change "Worriers" to "Warriors." It has become a ritual that begins each meeting, and underlines how action can transform anxiety.

In a positive spirit let us highlight how Small Groups are used in the "Listening Sessions" in the ongoing Synodal Process. Take the example of St. Anthony of Padua Church, Diocese of Bridgeport, Connecticut, USA:

"A Synodal Church in Mission: The Local Church Journeying Together in Preparation for Synod Session 2 in Rome, Oct. 2024"

Second Parish Session in St. Anthony of Padua Church in the Diocese of Bridgeport. The Synodal Process uses a Small Group of participants (typically 4-7 persons) who gather in St. Anthony's Parish Hall or in a "break-out room" on Zoom. They discern these questions:

Which lettered paragraphs in Ch. 8, 9, 11 of the "Synthesis Report" do you think can help our parish and/or our diocese become a more Synodal Church for mission in the years ahead? In one or two specific aspects of Local Church life and mission how might we promote such synodality? Helpful hints: In addressing these questions consider the structures in our parish and/or diocese (i.e. its offices, ministries, committees, etc.) and how these are organized and how they function – effectively or in need of improvement – for promoting a Synodal Church in mission.

May SCC members pray for and with the Synodal Church in Africa. "Church in Africa: Becoming Synodal in Mission" is a powerful theme.

Here is a dialog on SCCs in parishes in Kenya with Philomena Ikonye, a poet and journalist in Kenya:

Philo: "Thank you for your missionary work and the heading/direction of the SCC movement. Whilst reading about SCCs I came across your contact on the website regarding SCCs. I thought to write to you after reading various articles on SCCs written by different individuals. I am trying to see how SCCs can in our particular context be healthy cells of the parish I belong to. This because when seen as an early Christian way or style of living charity in the group and society, SCCs are great.

When seen as the Particular Churches' fuel provider then some limp out of the movement and wade around different groups for some are residential and others meet in the parish which is in the town of X near Nairobi.

But then a sense of belonging especially to the parish is not the first pride of members. As far as I see, it's the uniform, the impression of the day we are animating, the power to raise the amounts that will be needed (at that point I dropout/optout). And all the time missing the chance to live that happy Sunday as we ought. I am not complaining but willing to learn as I am accountable to one such group.

There is politicking on the leadership levels of faith, etc. And why not? There is a need to guide those not baptized or communing long before they enter a SCC or choose one where there is an instructor on the faith at a separate level. Maybe this dialog will help me to send the right points to the SCCs and to the Parish Council. Within the parish there are SCCs with constitutions that call for AGMs. Others just move from Sunday to Sunday. Which way is best apart from home being said you be the best? In the churches I attended abroad we just had Prayer Groups.

Kindly share with me if you can.”

Author: “Thank you, Philomena, for your interesting reflections. Please tell me from what country you come from.

Here are some of my reflections:

1. We do not use the term “SCC movement.” The Brazilian theologian Father José Marins says that Basic Ecclesial Communities/Small Christian Communities “are not a Movement in the Catholic Church, but the Church on the Move.” So the SCCs Model of Church is not like the various church movements -- the Marian Movement, the Charismatic Movement, the new Ecclesial Movements, etc. It is different as a “New Way of Being Church” from the grassroots, from below.

2. I agree when you say that there are many sides to SCCs. If they are the church from below, from the grassroots they will evolve according to the local context. The two pillars are weekly lectionary based faith sharing and frequently practical action/outreach. Ideally the parish is the communion of Small Christian Communities. SCCs are an official ecclesial, pastoral structure in the parish.”

Philo: "I bought *Small Christian Communities Today*, Healey and Hinton, eds and *God's Word in Christian Communities, Guidelines*, R. Baawoobr. And the *AMECEA Guidelines*. I must add that I fully agree with the Two Pillars of SCCs. Simplicity is important, because more than that brews into just talk. Read the *Word*. Love the sacraments. Pray. Act in the community in deeds of mercy.

Yes, do not use the word “movement.” It is almost used subconsciously when thinking in general about the entire approach. I understand that you have to distinguish it from other movements although it's the same Christians involved in movements praying as communities.

Always participating in church I tried to run away from group work because I need silent space, but somehow I got into a SCC because the Catholic Church keeps urging all to join one. There were optional Prayer Groups in Europe when I lived there. In my early years, and when SCCs started, I went to mass outside of parishes and again I was outside of Kenya. This makes me a learner and that is why am looking for what was intended and scrutinizing experiences.

When I asked the parish priest to pray for Our Lady of Fatima SCC he asked me to address the Parish Council because there are problems in many SCCs. This is why I am taking a look at them from existing literature apart from the experience of meetings and the issues of unity and happy participation -- not because the church says today that nobody knows me in church if am not in a SCC."

Author: I responded: "Thank you, Philo, for your many helpful reflections that I am posting on our: Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Facebook Page
<https://www.facebook.com/www.smallchristiancommunities.org>

Allow me to comment on one word: "cult." Here is footnote 170 on page 71 in the Ebook that I sent you:

During a visit to Mombasa Archdiocese in August, 2011 I learned an interesting footnote in SCC history. Kenyan Father Ernest Mutua, one of the founders of SCCs in the archdiocese, explained that when Kenyan Bishop (later Archbishop) Nicodemus Kirima (who died in 2007) was appointed as Bishop of Mombasa in 1978 he was initially against SCCs. He saw them as an offshoot of Protestant sects in Kenya. But then he went to the 1979 AMECEA meeting in Malawi and met and talked with dedicated animators of SCCs such as Mwoleka. Kirima was converted and came back and began to support SCCs starting in his diocese in 1979. This is a good testimony of the learning process that takes place during AMECEA meetings. Ernest Matua in a conversation with the author on 24 August, 2011.

Here in the USA a priest friend of mine who served in Bridgeport Diocese, Connecticut said that some of the Catholic bishops are against SCCs because they see them as separatist cults or sects.



Small Christian Communities
[Small Christian Communities](#)

In one of our Online SCC's gatherings this week, a SCC member said: "Before we love Jesus Christ, Jesus Christ loves us." This reminds us of one of the choices in our SCC Poll this month: The best part of my Small Christian Community is....: "Demonstrates the love of Jesus Christ."

From Abel Nagaya, St. Dominic SCC member: "St. Dominic SCC shares the best moments with its members as we come together to celebrate our diversity and our common spiritual growth. We share happiness and heartfelt joy through team building activities at the end of every academic semester."

ST. DOMINIC

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SATURDAY
16TH MARCH

from 2:30pm

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Mary Wahome: “My best, best, best part of belonging to an SCC at the end of the semester.

Email to Sister Nathalie Becquart in the Synod Office in Rome:

Dear Nathalie,

Greetings. Thank you for your generous time and suggestions during our conversation in the hotel during the Leadership Roundtable Summit in Arlington, Virginia on 29 February, 2024.

My last question to you was: “What do you suggest that I do during this time before the Second Session in October? You answered to collect grassroot examples of the pastoral topics related to a synodal way of being church.

Here is an example of a Case Study:

Sylvester Chimenge, “Interview with Jane Njenga on Polygamous Marriages and the Eucharistic Famine” on 10 November 2015 as quoted in *Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as a Platform for Continuous Catechesis in Eastern Africa -- Opportunities and Challenges: Case Study of Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish South B, Nairobi, Kenya*, Nairobi: Unpublished Master’s Thesis in Pastoral Ministry, Tangaza University College, 2016.

Jane Njenga is a second wife in a Catholic Parish in Nairobi, Kenya. She goes to Mass every Sunday and is a faithful member of her SCC. She entered the RCIA (Adult Catechumenate) with the desire to be baptized as a Catholic. But she had to stop the instructions because she is a second wife. Jane was unable to find a suitable husband (available men seem fewer in Kenya). To meet her human/sexual/social needs she decided to become a second wife.

Jane’s husband is a Catholic, but he had to stop receiving the Eucharist when he married Jane as his second wife.

What is the pastoral solution for Jane and her husband?

When I send this example to the Synod Office in the Kenya Catholic Conference of Bishops (KCCB), I get a polite acknowledgement and a note: “Because we are limited in the pages of our Kenya Report going to the Synod Office in Rome on 15 May, 2024, we cannot use your example.” So my Case Study ends up on a shelf.

What do I do in this situation? Your advice will be most helpful. Thanks.

Two weeks ago at the Leadership Roundtable Summit in Arlington, Virginia, USA I was privileged to have a 25-minute private conversation with Sister Nathalie Becquart. She said that the main reason that “Small Christian Communities” are officially mentioned twice in the “2023 Synod Synthesis Document” is that a number of voting delegates spoke about SCCs/BCCs/CEBs during the First Session in October, 2023 – in the round table listening sessions, in the Press Interviews and in the Interventions on the floor. My favorite talk was by Irish Sister Mary Theresa Barron, OLA, President of the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) [Women] who described her positive, pastoral experience of participating in SCCs in Mwamapalala Parish in Shinyanga Diocese. So we in Maryknoll can celebrate. To rephrase the Gospel text: “Can any good come out of Shinyanga?” The answer is “YES!”

In a webinar on Thursday, 14 March, 2024 on “Church in Africa: Becoming Synodal in Mission,” Bishop Charles Kasonde, the Bishop of Solwezi, Zambia and the Chairperson of AMECEA (the regional bishops’ association of conferences of nine countries in Eastern Africa) spoke on the pastoral care of Catholics in Africa who cannot receive communion (the “Eucharistic Famine”) for various other reasons. The **NOTE** is my own:

- Those in polygamous unions. **NOTE:** The Synod has asked the African Catholic Church to discern this challenge and recommend pastoral solutions.
- Divorced and remarried Catholics (irregular couples). **NOTE:** This is a worldwide challenge. The “Penitential Path” is one pastoral solution. Blessings of the individuals in such marriages are now permitted.
- Uncommitted Catholics. **NOTE:** Again this is a worldwide challenge. Formation, religious education and catechesis are needed. The Small Christian Communities (SCCs) can be helpful in this process.

NOTE: A recording of this AMECEA Webinar can be found on YouTube at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvrgAEAEdF0> It starts at: 50:05.

Okoth, Jecinter, “AMECEA: Family Life and SCCs, Ecclesial Models that Promote Synodality in AMECEA Region, Says AMECEA Chairman,” AMECEA Online News, Issue 535, 15 March, 2024, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 16 March, 2024, <https://communications.amecea.org/.../amecea-family-life...>

The foundation of synodality in the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) is the recognition of the significance of family life and the existence of well-established Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the region, AMECEA chairman has said during a webinar session held on Thursday, March 14. The webinar aimed to reflect on the experience of the themes that emerged during the first phase of the synodal journey that was held last year October in Rome.

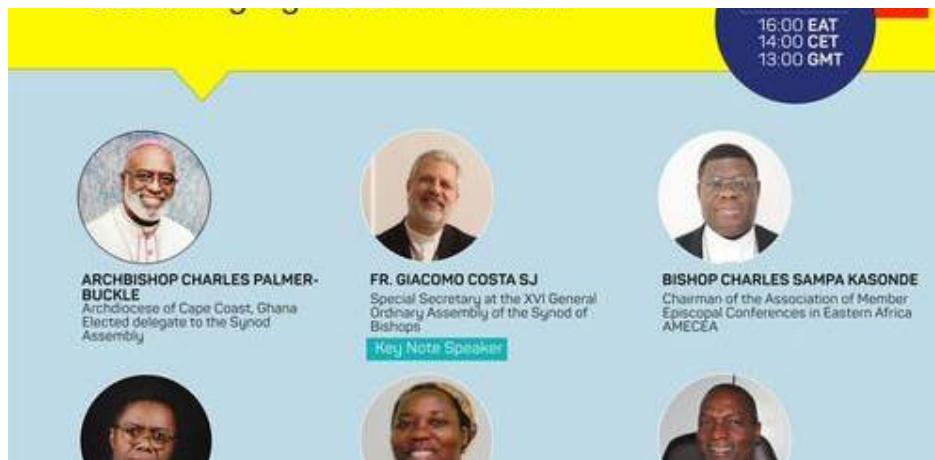


COMMUNICATIONS.AMECEA.ORG

AMECEA: Family Life and SCCs, Ecclesia Models that Promote Synodality in AMECEA Region, Says AMECEA

Isenjia, Silas, "AMECEA Chairman on How to Foster Synodality in Families, Small Christian Communities," ACI Africa Online Newsletter, 16 March, 2024, ACI Africa Website, retrieved on 16 March, 2024, https://www.aciafrica.org/news/10499/amecea-chairman-on-how-to-foster-synodality-in-families-small-christian-communities?utm_campaign=ACI%20Africa&utm_medium=email&hsmi=298491076&hsenc=p2ANqtz--mgnX2z1jMmzQ5qLqPi8IEzV6WdTdeLpLONOfvn57pY04UWV2_k1yviofp7svYJgndl8dP00aVN_xGBxpdsTFPBqZeWQ&utm_content=298491076&utm_source=hs_email

Speaking at a Thursday, March 14 virtual conference that AMECEA organized in partnership with the Association of Consecrated Women in Eastern and Central Africa (ACWECA), the African Synodality Initiative (ASI), and the Pan-African Episcopal Committee for Social Communications (CEPACS), an entity of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM), Bishop Charles Sampa Kasonde also explained how engaging in missionary activities and striving for "a deepened spirituality" can contribute to the fostering of Synodality among family and SCC members in Africa.



ACIAFRICA.ORG

AMECEA Chairman on How to Foster Synodality in Families, Small Christian Communities

Initiatives towards training, engaging in dialogue, aiming for a common ground in decision-making processes, and the fostering of inclusive participation are some of the ways the spirit of Synodality can be fostered in families and among members the new way of being Church in Africa, the Small....

In my homily today, 17 March, 2024, on the Fifth Sunday of Lent, Year B I am referring to both the Christian fast in Lent and the Muslim Fast in Ramadan. Faith is a gift from God given to all believers in different ways. For the Christian belief I am using the example of St. Bernadette of Lourdes, France who saw apparitions of the Blessed Virgin Mary. At the end of both the book and the movie *The Song of Bernadette* are the words: "For those who believe, no explanation is necessary. For those who do not believe, no explanation is possible."

The Maryknoll Affiliates' goal is "Seeking Global Community:" "We gather in small groups/small communities to be in mission to the world. Though each group/community is unique, all strive to build expanding circles of compassion through our practice of the pillars of Spirituality, Global Vision, Community and Action."



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Maryknoll Affiliates

We gather in small groups to be in mission to the world. Though each group is unique, all strive to build expanding circles of compassion.

To our ongoing discernment on practical, pastoral solutions to the "Eucharistic Famine," American Charlie Gibson adds this insightful reflection: "I have read several times your "Eucharistic Famine" emails, one of which was on 15 March, 2024. It was especially revealing showing the famine in Africa and Latin America. That up to 60% of adult African Catholics may not receive communion because of their "irregular" status.

A similar situation prevails in Latin America. In the latter case, when I was a Jesuit working in Ecuador, and talking with people from other countries I became very aware of the lack of sacramental marriages. I remember going out with a social worker in Guayaquil to visit some families. The social worker would ask, "bien casada?" ("Are you well-married, that is, in the Catholic Church?"). And the embarrassed reply was "No".

This situation is a scandal -- a great example of the exclusion mentality of the official church. Neither Jesus (nor Pope Francis) refused communion to anyone.

What I found fascinating--and I was not aware of it--is the African custom of "marriage in stages." I think that reflects reality, and if the official church were not so obsessed with sex and reproduction --there is never "parvity of matter" here--that would be a possibility. Historically, over the centuries the requirements for a sacramental marriage have changed: Initially it followed the Roman law of mutual consent. Then, around 800 and later the Germanic influence resulted in the additional requirement of "consummation." Conceivably, one could add the additional process of marriage by stages.

I say conceivably, because the current rules concerning sexuality and reproduction are for the most part not accepted by the vast number of faithful. And having professed male celibates (0.03% of church membership) making the rules of what to believe and how to behave for the other 97.97% of the faithful is an abuse of power that Synodality is trying to correct."

As the discernment on the Eucharistic Famine continues, Tom Reese adds: "But there is a growing Eucharistic Famine throughout the world, and Catholic Church leaders refuse to employ more people to respond to this famine because they are married, female or gay. Many rural areas see a priest only rarely. Catholics turn to the only worship services available to them, ones by Pentecostal or other evangelical Christian ministers."

Related to the latest published autobiography by Pope Francis in which he says: "It is true that the Vatican is the last absolute monarchy in Europe and reasoning and court maneuvers are often conducted there, but these patterns must be definitively abandoned and overcome."

What is key is how Francis responds to the recommendations at the end of the Second Session of the Synod in October, 2024. Not top down in a monarchical style, but responding to the practical, pastoral needs of the Catholic Church from the bottom up, from the grassroot up. A good example is to affirm practical, pastoral solutions to the different meanings of the Eucharistic Famine around the world.

Today in our St. Isidore Online Small Christian Community I will share the following:

In my reflections for Palm Sunday I am focusing on “Belief” and “Faith.” Our belief/faith in the Christian Paschal Mystery of Salvation in Jesus Christ (as described in the Palm Sunday Liturgy, the Scripture Readings and in the Lenten Season) is a free gift from our loving God. In the overall mystery of salvation we must listen to how other believers/other faith traditions feel that God has given them a gift of faith in Judaism, Islam, etc. We pray for ourselves in Jesus’ words to St. Thomas: “Do not be unbelieving, but believing.” We pray for and with:

- People with lukewarm faith.
- People who feel the Catholic Church is irrelevant.
- People who are disaffiliated.
- People who have “lost” the faith.
- People who are seeking.

Today, 19 March, on the Feast of St Joseph we are reminded that the Holy Family (Jesus, Mary and Joseph) was the first SCC. One of my favorite prayers is the prayer of Little Brother Carlo Carretto (an Orbis Books author) to St. Joseph: "Teach us to be small and poor in our work and humble and hidden in life." This is part of a larger beautiful prayer calling on Mary and Joseph for help: “Just as you were beside Jesus, you are beside us to accompany us to eternal life, to teach us to be small and poor in our work, and humble and hidden in life, courageous in trial, faithful in prayer, ardent in love.”

May our SCC members pray for and with two important research and writing projects:

Luke Muhindo, CSC, *Small Christian Communities and the Luo Traditional Communal Living in Mara Region of Tanzania: A Comparative Analysis*. PhD Dissertation at the University of Dar es Salaam in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies.

In tracing the origin of SCCs in Eastern Africa a very important book is: Marie-France Perrin Jassy, *Basic Communities in the African Churches*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973. It was an early Orbis Book. While it did not have a big sale, it has had a lot of influence. Laurenti Magesa writes about its influence on the thinking of African theologians on ecclesiology and lay leadership. Also there is Marie-France Perrin Jassy, *Forming Christian Communities*, Kampala: Gaba Pastoral Paper No. 12, 1970.

Alphonse Omolo, "Introduction" to the new Revised Edition of the book *Conversation, Risk & Conversion: The Inner & Public Life of Small Christian Communities* published by Orbis Books at Maryknoll, NY in 1997.

For the future a big challenge is how the SCCs Model of Church “incorporates new technologies” including AI (Artificial Intelligence).

"Greetings from here, Kiambu County, Kenya. I recall you had one day told me about the male Catholics when it come to effective participation in a given Small Christian Communities (SCCs) scenario. From research undertaken in the Kenya's Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi, three quarters of attending/participating Catholics in a given SCC congregation were women (female) participants.

This has come true at our church, Queen of the Holy Rosary, Kibichoi in the larger All Saints Komothai Parish, Kiambu County. At one time during the current mass celebrations of forty days before the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ, we were seven male Catholics including our priest and five children against more than 30 female Catholic women. Hopefully we continue to learn one or two things about this 'unfortunate' and 'discouraging' scenario. Thanks." --Francis Njuguna in Kibichoi, Kiambu County, Kenya

SMALL Christian Communities (SCCs)

By Francis Njuguna in Kibichoi, Kiambu County, Kenya/2024

Here is the string in this SCCs Forum:

- “A priest friend of mine, used to say, if men are not given important roles and ministries, they will go fishing and I have found that to be true. Most men like action and challenges and find it hard to just be a member of something where that is missing. Give men a mission of importance for Jesus and see what happens?”
- “This affirms our SCCs research. Men are drawn to the projects and activities of the SCCs. They are not attracted to the prayer and devotional side of SCCs.”
- “It seems the prayer and devotional side evolves as the men take on the responsibilities of ministry. They find they can't do their ministries without prayer and devotions. Once a man understands and embraces the terms given by Jesus to be a true disciple it is amazing the change that takes place in him and how willing he is to serve God.’
- “Good insight.”

“Within our larger All Saints Komothai Catholic Parish in the wider Kenya’s Kiambu County, Father James Marema has started a new pastoral program involving promotion of Small Christian Communities (SCCs)’s saintly patrons within the parish. He says, “This has been there before. We are only making efforts to make this workable. We realize this is part and parcel of the great pastoral mission of the church on the local level.”

He adds that some of the SCCs within the parish have already celebrated their saintly patrons in the course of this year, 2024 while more celebrations have been lined up for this purpose. “We are on the right course towards this direction and our local Catholics are fully supporting us,” says Marema. Speaking at Kibichoi where he celebrated the Mass to mark Saint Patrick’s Patron Day within Saint Patrick SCC, Father Marema centralized the need for each of the SCCs in the larger All Saints Komothai Parish to have a patron for their SCCs. “This will contribute greatly towards praying for their needs,” he underlined as he performed the Mass. Saint Agnes SCC has equally marked its saintly patron while the rest of the SCCs are being encouraged to undertake this pastoral commitment.

And this is going on, one would be interested to note that missionary priest, Father Joseph Healey, a Catholic Maryknoll priest from America and now retired in his home country of USA has done a lot towards initiating and promoting the SCCs programs on the African soil and in particular in the East African nations of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda and under the pastoral banner of the Association of Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) that brings together the Eastern and Central African countries of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Kenya, Malawi, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia, within the Catholic Church in the Eastern African region and under the Association of Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa, AMECEA, the Small Christian Communities, SCCs was established in 1973 the Catholic bishops in the Eastern African region.”

Patron Saints have always been a key part of the identity of the SCCs in Eastern Africa.

St. DOMINIC SCC FUN DAY REPORT By Abel Nagaya

On Saturday 16 March 2024 our Fun Day was a success due to the cooperation of all the members who gave their efforts to ensure the event's success, as members from different families of the SCC came together before the stipulated time for the event to prepare food. It was a nice experience as the members had to collaborate to ensure every role was attended to. The families' guardians and the SCC executive committee ensured all resources required were availed on time, hence activities ran smoothly. It was a great opportunity for all the members of the SCC to bond through team building activities, games and sharing a meal at the end of the day.

This created a great time for the St. Dominic SCC members as all the families within the SCC: St. Jude, St. Patrick, St. Bakhita, St. Cosmas and Damian and St. Anthony met and realized how fast they were growing as a Small Christian Community in the Kenyatta University Catholic Community (KUCC). It was realized the need to be inclusive in activities for both genders and therefore, “men's *baraza*” (gents meeting) and ladies meeting were suggested and scheduled to happen on different days to address inclusion for both females and males in SCC activities.

St. Dominic members were blessed to host two guests: Alloys Nyakundi and Albert Morang'a. The guests stressed on the importance of young people's roles and space in church activities and upholding their Catholic faith. They also learned that Small Christian Communities are vital in strengthening their faith and the growth of the church. They recognized that SCCs are the backbone of the church and how important it is for the young people to be active in church activities.

The event also provided an opportunity for the members to be introduced to their new Executive Committee since the election had been conducted a few days before the Fun Day.

St. Dominic SCC shares the best moments with its members as we come together to celebrate our diversity and the common spiritual growth we share happiness and heartfelt joy through team building activities at the end of every academic semester.



Abel's report is a good explanation of the inner life and activities of St. Dominic SCC.

“Glad that you are celebrating and socializing. José Marins identifies five features or components central to the CEBs dynamic in Latin America: Prayer; Reflection on Reality; Discernment and Decision; Action [Mission]; and Celebration. This can apply to Africa as well. The colorful photos bring the Fun Day to life.”

From Alloys Nyakundi: “Thanks so very much for the invitation. I really had a lot of fun, more so when I was given a punishment to carry a young woman on my back for not

doing the icebreaker correctly. These kinds of activities help members to bond and deepen their relationship with one another. St. Dominic, *Oyee...*”

Kunda, Sandra, “ZAMBIA: Bishop Benjamin Phiri Urges SCCs to Reach Out to Inactive Catholics,” *AMECEA Online News*, 22 March, 2024, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 23 March, 2024, <https://communications.amecea.org/.../zambia-bishop...>

Bishop Benjamin Phiri of Ndola Catholic Diocese in Zambia has urged Small Christian Communities (SCCs) to reach out to inactive Catholics, encouraging them to return to the Catholic Church. He emphasized the importance of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) reaching out to Catholics who are no longer practicing their faith and have stopped attending mass. Highlighting the need for SCCs to not only engage with active members but also with dormant ones, Phiri stressed the significance of understanding the reasons behind their absence and actively encouraging them to reconnect with the church.



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ZAMBIA: Bishop Benjamin Phiri Urges SCCs to Reach Out to Inactive Catholics

A key insight is the desire is understand the reasons behind the absence of those Catholics who are no longer practicing their faith and have stopped attending mass.

Today, Saturday, 23 March, 2024, from 9:30 am to 11:30 am we had a very successful physical (in-person) "Listening Session for the Interim Phase of the 2021-2024 Synod" (third in a series) at St. Paul Inside the Walls in Paterson Diocese, New Jersey, USA. 90 people participated. Bishop Kevin Sweeney opened the session and Father Paul Manning coordinated the process expertly. We sat at round tables of 5-6 people each. I was at Table 11 with two lay women and two laymen – all in their 50s and 60s, very committed to renewal in the Catholic Church and from different parishes in the diocese. There were no Young People at the session.

The creative process was Spiritual Conversation in small groups. The three rounds went smoothly with plenty of periods of prayer and silence.

Here are my personal learnings and observations:

1. We had a very compatible small group with good open sharing and insights.
2. A common theme was the “Yearning for Community.” Here I see an opening for different variations of the Small Christian Community Model of Church (including lectionary based small faith sharing groups in person, virtual and hybrid) contextualized in the USA.

3. Rich diversity in the Catholic Church today can be meaningful and creative.
4. From the handout -- *20 Priorities in the Synthesis of the Synod Oct 2023* -- I was struck by No. 17: "Recognizing and utilizing digital, online and virtual opportunities and challenges." Our small round table added – "to reach Young People in the USA today where they are at." **NOTE:** This was highlighted in a number of table reports.
5. I always enjoy being a Troublemaker. At our small round tables we were given name tags to write our first names. I notice the lay people wrote: Janet, Tom, Rosemary, etc., while the priests wrote Fr. Paul, etc. I wrote "Joe" as my small way of challenging clericalism in the Catholic Church and I explained why.
6. From my informal survey of Catholic dioceses in the USA I would say that Paterson Diocese is in the top quarter of active dioceses in the Synodal Process in 2024. Praise be to God.
7. Several people at my table mentioned that their children have left the Catholic Church and we discussed the great challenge of passing the Catholic Faith to the next generation in the USA today. May the Holy Spirit guide us.

I continue to be surprised that American Catholics do not know the term or expression "Small Christian Communities (SCCs)." Today I got an email message from a devout Catholic in Paterson Diocese, New Jersey: "Carole, my wife, and I are fascinated with the idea of "Small Christian Communities." It sounds like a concept that could work very well in our area." Then in an online Synod Listening Session a participant appreciated my explanation of the Small Christian Community Model of Church (as we experience in Eastern Africa) *vis-à-vis* the Small Group Model of Church (prevalent in the USA today).

SCCs were very visible and active in the RENEW International (based in Plainfield, New Jersey) generation in the 1980s and 1990s. Then SCCs seemed to go underground and the term or expression Small Group seemed to take over. All this is documented in the free, online Ebook *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*.

SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG
smallchristiancommunities.org

As I interview and talk with Catholics here in the USA, an ongoing pattern is that for American Catholics who want something "more" than just Sunday mass, they participate in some kind of small group that meets twice a month or once a month. They do not do "weekly" lectionary based faith sharing that is the hallmark of the SCCs Model of Church.

In the "20 Priorities in the Synthesis of the Synod, October 2023" No. 17 states: "Recognizing and utilizing digital, online and virtual opportunities and challenges." To this priority could be added: "to reach Young People in the USA where they are at today." Katie Maransky graduated from Georgetown University in Washington DC, USA in 2019. Wanting something "more" than just Sunday Mass, she and seven Georgetown Alumnae got together over the 2021 Lenten Season to continue their spiritual journey together online. They started an on Zoom-based Small Faith Community.

This has evolved until today when 18 Georgetown classmates and schoolmates use Group Chat or Group Text on their smartphones where they share scripture texts on a daily basis. During this Lenten season a recent text is *Luke 9:23*: "If want to come with me, you must forget yourself, take up your cross every day and follow me." This is an example of an online Alumni SCC using text messages to communicate and share their faith life, especially relevant scripture texts.

Blog on "Synodality" for Easter Sunday:

Theme: "Equality of Women"

Challenge: "Give women positions of leadership and decision making in the Catholic Church."

In the Gospel for Easter Sunday we are reminded that the first missionary after the Resurrection was Mary Magdalene, a woman. She was the first person to see the Risen Christ and then ran and brought the Good News to the Apostles in the Upper Room in Jerusalem. The increasing responsibilities of women in the Catholic Church is one of the main themes in the "Summary Report" of the First Session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops -- *A Synodal Church in Mission* -- that was published on 28 October, 2023.

I would like to comment on one sentence in Rene Reid's amazingly detailed report of Breakout Group 6 at the National Listening Session for the Interim Stage of the Synod – Region XVI: March 22, 2024: “Small Christian Communities need to be an official part of the Church.”

First, I hope the revision of *Canon Law* includes the official pastoral, ecclesial structures below the basic juridical unit of the parish: sub-parish, outstation (also called mission station and sub-station), SCC and family as the Domestic Church. This would encompass the pastoral experience of the Global South.

Then following the principles of subsidiarity, decentralization and contextualization, each Local Church (avoid the outdated word Particular Church) would develop its own pastoral language. For example, in Eastern Africa and in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) SCCs/CEVBs are already the official pastoral, ecclesial structure. This is part of the communion of communities ecclesiology. See the theological underpinnings in the writings of DRC theologian Sister Josée Ngalula.

“This is borne out in the experience of a new generation of Catholics coming into their own in today’s Ireland. Annie, who, like the other young people *America* spoke with, asked that her full name not be used to protect her privacy, is a young professional from rural Ireland who describes herself as a “practicing Catholic.” She does not assert that as a countercultural statement. It is just part of who she has become.

She was raised in a Mass-going family, and in adulthood she has embraced her faith as something of her own and something she treasures. She expresses it not only through sacramental observance but also through soup runs for Dublin’s homeless people and her participation in *Bible* Study and spiritual book clubs. She is part of an Intentional Christian Community. She helps with the children’s ministry in her parish and leads the young adult ministry.

Chris sees Pope Francis’ commitment to the synodal way as central to this emerging new church, a return to a more communal understanding of the faith. Chris grants that these are controversial topics, and there are some young adults in the Irish Catholic Church who are skeptical about this project. But he can see no way forward that is not in some sense a turn back to the vision of early Christian community found in the *New Testament*. He thinks forming people to better understanding of their faith. will be the key demand in the years ahead.”

During this Golden Anniversary Celebration of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa (1973-2023) we are harvesting the memories. The word "Camelot" refers a legendary castle and court associated with King Arthur. It first appeared in 12th-century French romances and eventually came to be described as the fantastic capital of Arthur's realm and a symbol of the Arthurian world. Medieval texts locate it somewhere in Great Britain.

"Camelot" symbolizes special, almost magical, times in human history. It can refer to both the time and the place. In an American context the Camelot era refers to the presidency of John F. Kennedy. In a 1963 *Life* interview, Jacqueline, his widow, referenced a line from the Lerner and Loewe musical to describe the Kennedy era White House: "Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment, that was known as Camelot." She indicated that it was one of Kennedy's favorite lyrics from the musical and added, "there'll be great Presidents again, but there'll never be another Camelot again."

"Camelot" in a Tanzanian context: A priority of the Catholic Church in the 1960s and 1970s was building Small Christian Communities, called *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo* or JNN in Swahili. Two Maryknoll Fathers, Dan Zwack and Jerry Pavis, had built up these communities in Nyarombo Parish in Musoma Diocese in Western Tanzania and Maryknoll Sisters Barbara Lambert and Barbara Nowak were in ministry there from 1969 to 1971 as integral members of the parish team.

Maryknoll Sister Barbara Lambert, MM later wrote of her remembrance of Nyarombo: "It seems that Nyarombo was meant to be a Camelot – a dream that happened for a short time – one shining example of how beautiful and happy pastoral work can be."

Catherine Erisman, *Maryknoll Sisters Tanzania 60 Years*. Maryknoll, NY: Privately Printed, 2015, 47-48.

"Busy as we are, let us "stop and smell the flowers" as we recall these special SCC moments from the past."

In August, 1968 I began studying Swahili at the Maryknoll Language School at Makoko, Musoma, Tanzania. During the Christmas--New Year holidays I spent several days in Nyarombo Parish with Dan Zwack. At that time I heard about the *chama*, the forerunner of SCCs, in the context of Luo customs and traditions, but I didn't appreciate their importance and their historical significance until later.

This week may our SCC members pray this prayer:

PRAYER FOR PEACE: Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and Haiti

Loving God,
 We pray for the people of Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and Haiti and for all those suffering or afraid,
 that you will be close to them and protect them.
 We pray for world leaders,
 for compassion, strength and wisdom to guide their choices.
 We pray for the world
 that in this moment of crisis,
 we may reach out in solidarity
 to our brothers and sisters in need.
 May we walk in your ways

so that peace and justice
become a reality for the people of Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, and Haiti and for all the world.
Amen.

“On this Good Friday as we remember the suffering and death of Jesus Christ, let us be in solidarity with people suffering in Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan and Haiti.”

During this 2024 Lenten Season that finishes this week, many Catholics have participated in a wide variety of lectionary based faith sharing small communities -- in person, online and hybrid. May this momentum and spiritual energy continue in being part of weekly permanent SCCs that become a normal way of our Christian way of life.

A parish in California brought together a group of women using the RENEW publication *Women in Conversation* when it was published in 2021. Inspired by their faith-sharing, the women didn't want it to end when they reached the final session of that program, so they have continued to meet. Three years later, there is a thriving women's small-group ministry. Revitalizing parishes through Small Christian Communities is RENEW's mission, whether through our core experiences—*Be My Witness, Why Catholic?* or *ARISE Together in Christ*—or more topical experiences such as *Women in Conversation*.

RENEW fosters virtual Small Christian Communities as well! It has just finished successful online Lenten faith sharing. Check our Events Page for future online faith sharing opportunities. <https://www.renewintl.org/events>



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Events and Webinars

Talk of Helena Jeppesen-Spühler, synod delegate from Switzerland and program officer for the Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund who was the featured guest at a Global Ecclesial Synodal Council gathering hosted by Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI) on Saturday, 23 March 2024.

Asked to elaborate on the place of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Synod's Synthesis Report, Jeppesen-Spühler responded that “the question is more the relation between parishes and the leadership of the parish with Small Christian Communities.”

She shared that there was substantial discussion about formation of priests for a Synodal Church. Formation of priests and laypeople is one approach, but it “has to lead to structural changes,” she said. “A synodal church requires different structures” and “a change of culture and structure,” she added. As examples of structural changes, Jeppesen-Spühler mentioned the “obligatory nature of Pastoral Councils in Christian communities and local churches” referenced in the *Synthesis Report* (18.h).

“A recurring theme is that Catholics in the Western world do not understand how the pastoral, ecclesial SCCs Model of Church works in Africa.”

Ninetieth Round (March -- April, 2024):- The best part of my Small Christian Community is...

Choice: "Demonstrates the love of Jesus Christ."

Please answer what this choice means to you.

- First, we have Jesus saying to us: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (*Matthew* 18:20). Second, during Holy Week we realize Jesus' great love for all humankind through his suffering, death and Resurrection. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (*John* 3:16).
- Reflection on Easter Sunday Gospel:

"As I read this passage, I wondered about one detail: why doesn't the second disciple have a name? There's Simon Peter, and then there's "the other disciple whom Jesus loved." He remains nameless throughout this passage, and my first instinct is to think that "the other disciple" is getting shortchanged. We see this disciple's devotion to Jesus. We're told that he ran faster than Peter and got to the tomb first. But we never learn his name. He's just "the other disciple."

Taking a closer look, I wonder if John's true intent lies in that first sentence. "The other disciple whom Jesus loved." That's an unusual way to identify a person, but it carries a lot more meaning than a name can. Maybe the takeaway here is that, as Christians, the most essential part of our identity is that Jesus loves us."

Who am I? As we go through our daily lives, we fill in that answer in many different ways. We identify ourselves by our family roles, our professions, and our affiliations, and, as has been pointed out to me more than once, we often very proudly identify ourselves as Dominicans. But on this Easter Sunday, the most significant day of the liturgical year, John reminds us that our most important identity is always beloved by Jesus.

May we all embrace that identity today.

An Artificial intelligence (AI) overview on Google Search produces the following: *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* is a book by Joseph Graham Healey that was first published in 2018. The book has gone through several editions, including a first version presented as a paper at the 13th Interdisciplinary Theological Session in 2012. The revised version was published in August 2020. The book is available as a free online ebook from Small Christian Communities.

The book discusses the quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the growth of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the AMECEA region, which has over 195,000 SCCs. The book also includes interviews with bishops and other pastoral agents in the AMECEA region. SCCs are a new model of church in Africa, and are a service organization for the Catholic National Episcopal Conferences of the nine English-speaking countries of Eastern Africa.

Go to: <https://www.google.com/search.....>

See more



GOOGLE.COM

Building the Church As Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa

[Building the Church As Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa](#)

From Mwanajumuiya Francis Njuguna in Kibichoi, Kiambu County, Kenya: "We have just marked our 2024 Easter celebrations. As usual, the attendance in our church -- Queen of the Holy Rosary Catholic Church -- was three quarters women with men and children in the minority. This is something the Local Church has to work on to ensure the number of men balances that of women. Even in our SCCs, the situation is the same."

From Ron McCollum: "In business when we knew we had a problem, we would begin a process of asking the question, why is this happening. If you keep asking the question why, long enough, you get to the bottom of the problem in most cases. This imbalance regarding men and women is found in most churches from what I can discern. Not only are men not coming, but many who are involved in church settings are leaving. What drove the mighty men to leave Saul and go over to David, living in the cave of Adullam? One of the main reasons stated in *1st Samuel 22:2* was discontent. If we can discover the reasons for the discontent, while giving men a vision for serving Christ, there is a good chance there will be a greater participation by men. I was saved in a church where men were expected to lead and the ratio between men and women was very close."

"Thanks for this insight. Let us continue with our evaluation and assessment of this discontent."

Among our many prayers during the coming Easter Season, I hope that we SCC members will pray for "harmony" in the Catholic Church. This is what Pope Francis thought was missing among the delegates at the final, voting session of the Amazon Synod in Rome in October, 2019. May the Holy Spirit bring harmony to the voting delegates at the final, voting session of Session Two of the October, 2024 Synod.

From Alloys Nyakundi:

"On Saturday 30 March I arrived here in Zimbabwe to interact and share with young people the importance of SCCs for the young people and the importance of having a Synodal Church. I have been having ongoing conversations with young people at Makumbi Parish and I'm very much encouraged by their passion, love and the Synodality spirit in their projects. They are ready to transform the society regardless of so many challenges they are facing here. I hope to accomplish a lot by the end of my stay here. Your prayers and best wishes are welcome.

Happy Easter."

“Prayers and best wishes on your interaction with Young People SCCs in Zimbabwe.”

Blog on "Synodality" for the 2nd Sunday of Easter:

Reflections on “Synodality” to Accompany the Maryknoll 2024 Easter Season
Reflection Guides

2nd Sunday of Easter Gospel *John 20:19-31* (April 7, 2024)

Theme: Mercy To All

Challenge: Invite everyone into an inclusive Catholic Church.

On this Divine Mercy Sunday we are reminded that recent popes have tirelessly taught that God’s mercy is for everyone. *Repente conmigo: Todos, todos, todos* [Portuguese]. (“Repeat with me: Everyone, everyone, everyone.”), Pope Francis proclaimed this message to 1.5 million young people at World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal in August, 2023. He later emphasized that the Catholic Church is open to everyone including “the sick, the elderly, the young, old, ugly, beautiful, good, and bad.”

How do SCC members see themselves in relation to the seven different meanings of the Eucharistic Famine/Eucharistic Hunger worldwide that we have identified?

Catholics do not receive Communion because they:

1. Go to a Catholic Church Service especially on Sunday where there is no mass or communion because there is no male, celibate priest to celebrate a mass.
2. Are divorced and remarried outside the Catholic Church (“irregular” couples who have not gotten an annulment). **NOTE:** Pope Francis has recommended “The Penitential Path” as a practical, pastoral solution, but many people don’t know about this method.
3. Have not had a sacramental marriage in church and so they can’t receive the Eucharist. They have had a civil and/or traditional marriage, but they have not had a church marriage for various reasons including financial costs of the dowry and the wedding.
4. Live together before getting married in a Catholic Church (cohabitation). **NOTE:** Here in New Jersey, USA we estimate that 98 % of the young couples that go to a Catholic Parish to arrange their sacramental Catholic marriage are already living together.
5. Are in a polygamous union.
6. Are single mothers who has given birth within the last year.
7. Are people who were sexually abused and cannot stand entering a church or receiving the Eucharist by a priest because of the trauma of their sexual abuse by a priest and the subsequent coverups by some bishops.

Do you, your family, your friends and your SCC fit into any of these categories?

Individual SCCs are trying to help their members to find concrete, pastoral solutions to these obstacles/problems.

Margaret Mary Moore has suggested a Sixth Meaning of the Eucharistic Famine: "Would you consider under your five points a No. 6? I have heard from several survivor groups that people who were sexually abused cannot stand entering a church or receiving the

Eucharist by a priest because of the trauma of their sexual abuse by a priest and the subsequent coverups by some bishops."

For those committed Catholics who want to do more than participate in Mass on Sunday they can join/be part of:

1. Participate in a weekly Lectionary Based Faith Sharing Small Christian Community that reads the Gospel of the following Sunday and applies it to their daily life.
2. Become Altar Servers, Eucharistic Ministers and Lectors.
3. Join faith formation and religious education groups such as Bible Study, Family Based Faith Formation Program and the Rite for Christian Initiation for Adults (RCIA)
4. Join church ministries such as Catholic Men's Group, Catholic Women's Group, Charismatic Prayer Group, the Choir, the Knights of Columbus, the Respect Life Group, the Singles Group, the Young Adult Group and the Youth Group.
5. Join compassionate ministries such as Alcoholic Anonymous (AA), the Bereavement Group and the Divorced and Separated Support Group.
6. Join Devotional Groups such as Eucharistic Adoration, Prayer Group and the Rosary Society.
7. Service Projects (outreach) such as Catholic Charities, Christ Child Society, Food Bank, Giving Tree, International Outreach, Justice and Peace Committee and the Soup Kitchen.

NOTE: This is just a sample. There are over 100 ministries and groups. Some are Spanish speaking.

Message from Margaret Whelan Strong:

"On 8 April 2024 I will be meeting with our local Deanery to discuss the idea of spreading Christ Child Society's mission a little farther than Summit and to make more people aware of this great organization and all the good work the 5,500 members in the 45 chapters here in the US currently do. I personally believe that an organization such as ours which has strong roots in the Catholic faith and is focused on the need of at-risk children in their local communities, is a way of strengthening the Catholic faith of those who consider themselves to be practicing Catholics, as well as, strengthening the faith of people who may have wandered away.

Background:

Christ Child Society was founded by Mary Virginia Merrick in 1887 in the Washington DC, USA area to provide for infants, children and their families in the Washington, DC area. Mary was paralyzed at a young age but despite that during her lifetime (died at 88 years) she grew the organization to 38 chapters. She initially did this by gathering friends and sewing clothes to complete a layette for a child in need at Christmas time. The next year she answered a Christmas wish of a child of one of her families employees after she encouraged him to write a letter to the Christ Child. And from there it grew. Mary's cause for beatification was opened in 2002 and in 2003 she was designated a Servant of God.

Christ Child Society of Summit (CCS of Summit)
Local Chapter and only Chapter in the Archdiocese of Newark."

From Matt Rousso: "I think the future of the church that you talk about is now. We need to begin to radically be the church that Leonardo Boff and others say we should be. We have not sufficiently become the change and the hierarchical structure needs to be redone."

Myself: "We have started this change in some places in Eastern Africa. We are shifting away from the physical parish headquarters (church, hall, rectory, convent) being the center to the neighborhood geographical Small Christian Communities (SCCs) being the center of the Catholic life and activities (such as daily prayers, mass, the sacraments, celebrations and outreach such as visiting the sick)."

There is a lot of online discussion on *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEBs) in Brazil where they started in 1956. They have gone through many historical changes. The high point was the Liberation Theology Era in the 1970s to 2000 when they were more than 100,000 CEBs in Brazil. That era of a Social Justice/Social Action Model has gone by and their leaders have died.

Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga has stated that CEBs always have to reinvent themselves in the light of the new historical, political, social and economic realities of Latin America. A more Pastoral Model that is closer to the official Catholic Church has emerged with smaller numbers. Today the fast growing Pentecostal Church is challenging the Catholic Church throughout Latin America.

The Amazon Synod asked for married priests, women deacons and other innovations. These changes have not happened. Prayers.

We SCC members can be inspired by the book the *Acts of the Apostles* during this Easter Season. Starting the Monday within the Octave of Easter – the first reading of daily mass is from *Acts*: 2:14, 22-33. Then the next day is: *Acts*: 2: 36-41. Then day by day consecutively until the Saturday before Pentecost Sunday when it is *Acts* 28: 16-20, 30-31. Dramatic and powerful readings. Then on the Sundays of the Easter Season the First Reading is always from *Acts*.

The First Reading for next Sunday (7 April, 2024) is *Acts* 4:32-35: 30 "Now the community of believers was of one heart and mind/ the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. 33 With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. 34 There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. 35 They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

We use this scripture passage in all our Small Christian Communities Workshops and Seminars in Eastern Africa.

Some say that this description of the Small Christian Communities in the first century of the Catholic Church is idealistic and cannot be imitated or followed in our world today. But others say that with the help of the Holy Spirit we can live authentically different variations of this Small Christian Community Model of Church in our contemporary world.

Neocatechumenal Way

The Neocatechumenal Way, also known as the Neocatechumenate, NCW or, colloquially, The Way, is a movement within the Catholic Church that focuses on the formation of Christian adults. It was formed in Madrid in 1964 by Kiko Argüello and Carmen Hernández and received approval from the Holy See in 2008. Taking its inspiration from the catechumenate of the early Catholic Church, by which converts from paganism were prepared for baptism, it provides post-baptismal formation to adults who are already members of the Catholic Church. It also runs over 100 seminaries in various locations, and is responsible for hundreds of "families in mission," living in many cities around the world. The Neocatechumenal Way is implemented in Small, Parish Based Communities (SPBCs) of between 20-50 people.

Saint Agnes Church in Paterson Diocese, USA has six Neocatechumenal Way Communities that “walk” in Spanish and one that “walks” in English. They celebrate the Eucharist every Saturday at 8:30 PM.

Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, the Detroit bishop who for many American Catholics defined faith-based social justice activism in the post-Vatican II Church, died 4 April, 2024. He was 94. Let us pray for and with him. May he rest in peace.

Tom was a good friend of Maryknoll and Orbis Books.

To me Tom was a hero – a prophet among the USA Bishops -- who stood up for peace, justice and LGBTQ+ rights.

I have a special bond with Tom. When my first Orbis Book -- *A Fifth Gospel: The Experience of Back Christian Values* – was published in 1981, he wrote the following “Blurb” on the back cover:

Joe Healey doesn't simply take us to Africa; he brings Africa and all its richness to us. His experiences in what may seem to us at first to be a different and far off land become very real, very alive and very definitely experiences of the heart. It is not just a sensitive story, but more a journey that begins and concludes with ourselves.

When *A Fifth Gospel: The Experience of Back Christian Values* was first published by Orbis Books in 1981, Catherine de Hueck Doherty wrote the following “Blurb” on the back cover:

I was especially interested that small groups in the villages [in East Africa] meet weekly to read the Scriptures of the following Sunday and apply them to their own lives. I think that is one of the healthiest things that can be done: to bring the Gospel, the Scriptures and their message into the daily lives of people.

The AMECEA Office in Nairobi, Kenya is asking us to respond to these two questions:

1. In the nine AMECEA countries which diocese/dioceses has the best celebrations of the 50 Year Anniversary (1973 – 2023) of Small Christian Communities (SCCs)?
2. In the nine AMECEA countries which diocese/dioceses is the most "synodal," that is, is most active in the 2024 Synodal Process?

Please post the names below or send to Joe Healey.

I responded with those dioceses that are celebrating this year 2024 by combining the SCCs' Golden Jubilee and the Synodal Process: Geita, Tanzania; Solwezi, Zambia; and Lilongwe, Malawi.

“It is a lot of work but you can find out about the Synodal and SCCs activities by searching on diocesan and national websites.”

Pelaji, Sarah, “TANZANIA: Easter is Continued Celebration of SCCs Jubilee in AMECEA, and the Construction of a Synodal Church,” *AMECEA Online News*, Issue 538, 4 April, 2014, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 6 April, 2024, <https://communications.amecea.org/index.php/2024/04/05/tanzania-easter-is-continued-celebration-of-sccs-jubilee-in-amecea-and-the-construction-of-a-synodal-church>

Easter Celebration is a continuation of the journey of reflection on the construction of the Synod Church guided by the slogan “For the Synod Church: Unity, Participation and Mission. “This Easter is celebrated in conjunction with the 50th Jubilee of Small Christian Communities in AMECEA countries under the slogan “Small Christian Communities: 50 Years of Building the Church as Family of God in AMECEA countries.” Bishop Flavian Kassala says that the Church as the Family of God in AMECEA countries finds its origin in the ecclesial model of Small Christian Communities (SCCs). Policies, plans and strategies of pastoral activities in the Synod and in the Small Christian Communities bring peace and light to the believers and to the whole world.

“This article deserves close reading and reflection since it describes very well the life and activities of SCCs.”

From Bishop Charles Kasonde: "Indeed it is happening in my Diocese of Solwezi. The interplay between the Synod and SCCs is magnetic. This is being church -- the Synodal Process and SCCs creating oneness and togetherness."

With the notoriety of American Catholic College basketball star Caitan Clark, it is interesting read about this Small Christian Community Model in her life.

Before graduating from Dowling High School in Iowa, USA in 2019, Clark became and remains involved with a club called *Ut Fidem*, Latin for “keep the faith.” Having experienced a Kairos retreat as a junior, Caitlin joined *Ut Fidem* as a senior. The group’s focus, according to Dowling’s website, “strives to develop high school students into intentional disciples who will keep the faith for the rest of their lives, and especially through college” and supports students via weekly Small Faith Groups of five or six led by adult faith mentors.

Students learn how to “defend their Catholic faith, and develop deep, personal relationships with Jesus Christ . . . grow their devotion to personal prayer, the sacramental life, understanding of church teachings, and enter into the lifestyle of an on-fire Catholic” and better understand how to discern the question, “Why am I Catholic?”

Using some of the tools she learned in grade school and high school and benefiting from a close, faith-sharing family, Clark recently started the nonprofit Caitlin Clark Foundation — described as a mission to “uplift and improve the lives of youth and their communities through education, nutrition and sport.”

From Patti Maransky in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA: "Small Faith Groups seem to be a key ingredient for our Catholic faith community. We didn't really have anything like this in my Catholic High School, but I can remember our retreats fondly. Although we joked about them you could tell from the participation that we craved these discussions and desired something more from our faith."

“I hope more Catholic High Schools develop for their graduates Alumni Small Faith Sharing Communities (ASFSCs) or Alumni Small Faith Groups (ASFSGs). Online seems the most realistic way of communication.”

To learn more about the *Ut Fidem* (“Keep the Faith”) program at Dowling Catholic High School in West Des Moines, Iowa, USA go to: <https://www.dowlingcatholic.org/ut-fidem> *Ut Fidem* alumni are more likely to be committed to their faith, feel more confident in defending it, continue growing in their faith in college, and engage in faith behaviors like daily prayer, Mass, reconciliation and [ongoing] Alumni Small Faith Groups than non-*Ut Fidem* alumni.

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Faith | Dowling Catholic High School

WEEKEND UPDATES for Saturday, 6 April, 2024 of the Pan-African Catholic Theology and Pastoral Network (PACTPAN) reminds us that Sister Josée Ngalula of DRC’s publications on “African ecclesiologies” focus on African creativity arising from the dynamism of Small Christian Communities and the synodality experienced in this context.

May all our SCC members pray for and with the 30 Year Commemoration of the genocide in Rwanda. (7 April, 1994 to 7 April, 2024) Also 30 years ago the First African Synod was starting in Rome.

As we draft the *SCCs Handbook @ 50* to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of SCCs in AMECEA (1973 to 2023), Chapter One is:

"Tracing the Historical Moments of SCCs in AMECEA"

- a. The origins and development of SCCs in AMECEA.
- b. What prompted the Bishops of AMECEA to come up with the idea of SCCs.

A key part is the influence today of the internet, world wide web, social media, online newsletters, Ebooks and other online materials. Two examples:

AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa) Website (including the sub-domains of Communications, Integral Human Development and Pastoral) <https://amecea.org>

The Copyright is 1999-2024 and shows that it was ahead of the curve and ahead of its time. This website sets an example for all of the AMECEA countries and the SECAM countries for internet use. The Menu at top of the Home Page shows the rich variety of departments and activities.

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website
<https://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>

This website was started in 2004 with a vision to establish a global collaborative networking website for Small Christian Communities (SCCs) worldwide. We share SCCs contact information, events, materials, news, videos and photos for each of the six continents. Special features on the Home Page include a “SCC Poll,” “What’s New” and a “Calendar of Events.” We welcome any and all feedback, contributions, SCCs materials, etc.



SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

Small Christian Communities

Small Christian Communities, Eastern Africa, church

Maduku, Ignace Ndongala, “African Palaver and Interpretation of the Word of God with and for the People of God: A Case for the Dialogical Construction of the Homily in the Small Christian Communities in Africa,” in Ikenna U. Okafor, Joséé Ngalula, Nicholas Segeja and Stan Chu Ilo (eds.), *Toward a Synodal Church in Africa: Echoes from an African Christian Palaver*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2024.

A good example of living synodally, the Synodal Process and the Synodal Church is this Case Study from Saint-Trinité Parish in Saint Alphonse Deanery in Kinshasa Archdiocese in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). A priest prepares his Sunday Homilies in Lingala (the liturgical language of Kinshasa Archdiocese) with members of a Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC) -- also called a Small Christian Community (SCC) -- in the parish. This is described as “from a homily for the People of God to a Homily with the People of God.” This is an experience of pooling a popular reading of the Word of God with an exegetical reading. The General Introduction states: “In line with the decolonisation of theological knowledge and the co-construction of knowledge in the sense of a *pastorale d’engendrement* (pastoral generation), Ignace Ndongala reports how a synodal shift from a monological authority of interpretation of the Word of God to a polyphonic praxis in homiletics in tune with the culture of *palaver* and fraternal dialogue associated with the Church Family of God has yielded good results at the grassroot level of the Basic Ecclesial Communities.”

Our free, online Ebook documents some Case Studies of homilies being written with the SCC members: Ascension Catholic Church; Lansing Diocese; Nova; SCCs using *Lectio Divina*; St. Isidore SCC; St. Kizito SCC; Toolbox series; and Yale University.

Makunde, Anthony, “Message of AMECEA at the Second Pan-African Congress on Theology, Society and Pastoral Life” in Ikenna U. Okafor, Joséé Ngalula, Nicholas Segeja and Stan Chu Ilo (eds.), *Toward a Synodal Church in Africa: Echoes from an African Christian Palaver*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2024.

In the welcome message of AMECEA Makunde states:

AMECEA is well known for its pastoral structure of well-organized Small Christian Communities (SCCs). This structure domesticates theology at the grassroots among the people at the periphery, whose voices are often not heard in major theological discourses. As theologians, it will interest you to learn about the efforts AMECEA has put in place to promote theological discipline at the grassroots (Small Christian Communities). They are efforts which correspond to the vision of the synodal process—to reach out and listen to the forgotten voices.

I do believe that together we can achieve this dream. As YOU theologize at a high intellectual level, which is what this congress provides, WE, in the AMECEA Region through SCCs will diffuse that theology to meet the needs of the common people on the ground. The SCCs provide a conducive environment and fertile ground for consultation, listening, discernment, participation and taking everybody on board as the Catholic Church walks together guided by the Holy Spirit.

The Orbis Books Edition can be ordered from: <https://orbisbooks.com/> The Paulines Publications Africa Edition with the slightly different title *Journeying Together for a Synodal Church in Africa* can be ordered from: <http://www.paulinesafrica.org/>

“Excellent book. I am reading the chapters slowly. Lots of rich materials on synodality. Gives an important voice to Africa. Several chapters on SCCs. Perfect read as a lead up to Session Two of the Synod in October, 2024.”

Here are Marie Venner's reflections on homilies from the experience of Zimbabwe:

"Speaking of homilies, here is one written by Liberty Vongai Jiri, Youth and Vocations Director at St. Martin de Porres Parish in Zimbabwe that has 28 subparishes and the most active, exciting youth group I have ever seen (aside from the one I had in high school, that formed me and showed/expected me to step up and assume adult responsibilities in the church, starting at age 14 or 15). The young people that Liberty and Tino (Youth Advisor) have organized were truly impressive, as are their leaders. The priests are great there too -- extensive conversations with Jesuit leaders of countrywide programs and a shorter/half hour conversation with the person developing the Masters and PhD programs in Social Transformation. Liberty and Tino are proven, trusted collaborators this year and last. The young people also already knew about Synodality (though not Vatican II per se) and are writing reflections this month to submit as part of the Synodal Process, though even at Arrupe University we were not able to find the date by which this should be submitted in Zimbabwe."

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By Liberty Vongai Jiri,

"The past two weeks I've had a chance to be in staff meetings with some of the sharpest people in the nation, not to brag ...so we get into the room and we do selfies – that`s dumb. Get into the room, pass on the SELFIE and get the experience! Show me you were in

the room by what you do with your life and how you are transforming the community, not by what you post with your PICTURE.

NOW IS THE TIME! When we met on Holy Thursday, someone said, “Don’t wait for a certain age, like when I’m 26 or 27 or 28, then I will start to hustle, farm, and do various projects. No, Mr Tino our Advisor said “Now is the Time” to start your life, to do your own things, and contribute to a community of empowerment, not to only rely on the contributions of others.

“Now is the Time,” before we are busy with full-time paying jobs (or even after, like Mr Tino), to do a lot of projects in the community and for further empowerment and well-being, learn as many things as we can, get exposed to many opportunities and make those opportunities ourselves, continuing to consider how we can do and contribute more. See what others are doing out there and try some of these things. Sure, we’re all waiting for a job, but having your own kinda project or your own small scale project, you can earn money from there. They say nothing comes for free or lying on your bed. Only death comes for free (in Shona *Rufu ndorwega rwunouya mahara*) so take the advantage of being young while you are still fit and active. Smoke away the laziness thing in you and start to focus on your Life. All I can say is take these projects seriously. They have been identifying these in recent months and further discussion, identification, and organizing at Holy Thursday and Saturday meetings.

Let’s work together as a Synodal Church, journeying together, weaving a strong fabric of community, mutual support and leaving things better in our wake.

Why wait to start your personal things without relying on someone? We are all discerning, whether it is getting married, making investments, or getting started on anything. It’s always tempting to wait until tomorrow, but the time is now for resurrection and building our communities of empowerment. Why wait?

The promise that what God has for you is usually discovered in the process. We put ourselves in process, walking and working together. The work always requires patience and cultivation of life, wherever we find it, imagine it, or can help grow it into a more beautiful garden.

Young men and women, remember before you were born, God said in *Jeremiah* 29:11: “I have plans for you, plans for you to prosper, plans to give you a hope and a future”. We have good things planned for you and we are at the starting line. We trust in God to deliver, and with openness and curiosity, we are exploring the opportunities before us. Sometimes we want to ask God “What’s the promise? I will go when you tell me the promise, I will obey when you tell me the specifics of the promise.” But those emerge on the journey. God says: “The first step I told you to make, obey that one. Move forward, doing and giving all that you can”.

Have you all seen *The Wizard of Oz* (movie) -- the part “follow the yellow brick road”? That’s what the Christian life is like. You don’t see where the yellow bricks lead until you start and make the journey. You take a step and another brick comes. You realize that if you start stepping quicker, you discover more, more quickly, and the next opportunity or open door emerges. God is always in the opening windows and closing doors (which leave space for other things) in our lives. What we are often doing as youth is we are waiting for God to show us everything, and we don’t want to take steps until we feel like we know what

is gonna happen. But God said, “my plans are not your plans.” Will finish for you at our Small Christianity Community meeting.

The bottom line is: don't just wait for everything. Use that hand of yours, use your skills, try things out, fail even, and you will learn from that and that will help you in your further steps. Your life and connection to God is through (everybody say ‘PRAYER’). GOOD LUCK, God bless you.

I PRAY IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, THE HOLY SPIRIT AND SON. GOD I CAN'T BE EVERYWHERE TO WATCH OVER MY ELDERS, FRIENDS, YOUTH, BUT YOU CAN PLEASE WATCH OVER THEM AND PROTECT THEM FROM EVIL. I PRAY. AMEN.

Liberty

3rd Sunday of Easter Gospel Lk 24:35-48 (April 14, 2024)

Theme: Walking Together

Challenge: Find practical, pastoral solutions to the worldwide Eucharistic Famine.

The two disciples met Jesus walking together on the road to Emmaus. Our Gospel begins: “Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.” The Second Vatican Council says that “the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life.” In the USA we are thankful that we can participate in mass frequently and receive Holy Communion. We hope that the Second Session of the Synod on Synodality in Rome in October, 2024 will offer practical, pastoral solutions to the Eucharistic Famine (also called the Eucharistic Hunger and the Eucharistic Deprivation). Research shows that due to the lack of male, celibate priests, on any given Sunday most Catholics in Africa (up to 60% in some surveys) participate in a “Sunday Service Without a Priest” where there is usually no Holy Communion especially in rural areas rather than participate in a regular mass. Bishop Patrick Kalilombe of Malawi talks about the importance of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) being Eucharistic Communities, but in fact they are not especially in rural areas in Africa. Research in the Amazon in Latin America indicates that there are rural Catholic communities (what we call outstations or mission stations in Africa) that only get Mass once or twice a year. Pope Francis has spoken about this pastoral challenge, even crisis, several times.

In the Spring, 2024 issue of *Mission* (a magazine of the Pontifical Mission Societies), there is an article called “Here I am, I said, “send me!” It describes how “St. Bernadette Parish in Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi started as an outstation of another parish and now is a full-fledged parish with three outstations of its own. Small Christian Communities (SCCs) exist in these outstations where the members meet regularly to pray, study the Scriptures and learn more about the tenets of Catholicism.” The parish's three catechists travel many miles each week to bring the faith to these SCCs. This is the growth pattern of the Catholic Church across Eastern Africa.

“Dar es Salaam Archdiocese in Tanzania is a good example of this growth pattern.”

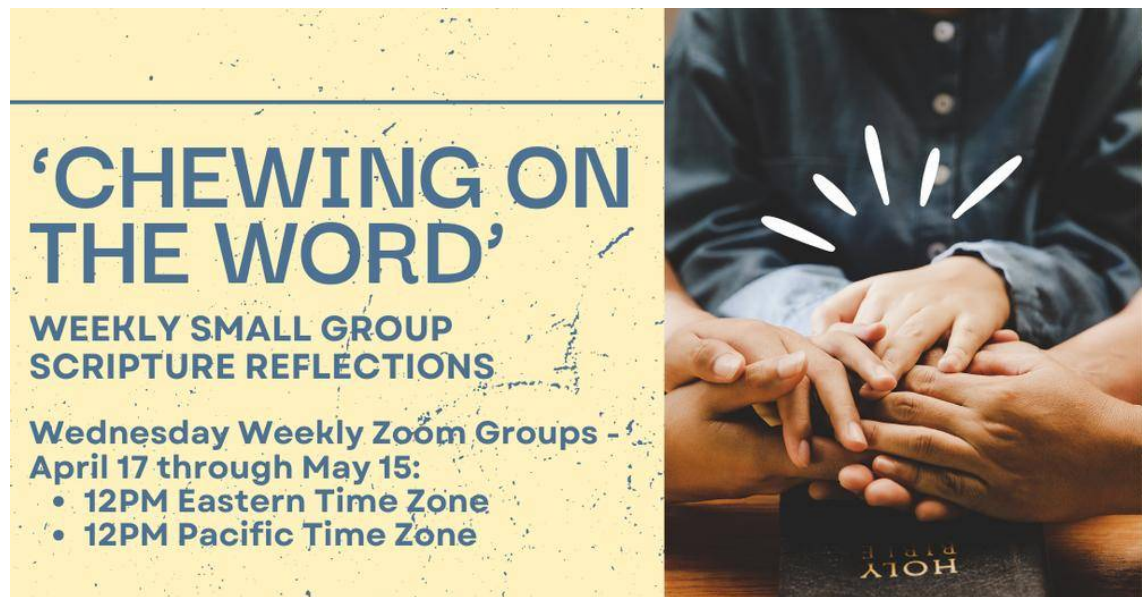
From Alloys Nyakundi: “This shows the importance of starting small and at the same time trusting the power of the Holy Spirit.”

“Chewing on The Word” Reflections

Sponsored through the Maryknoll Society we are continuing to meet in our weekly online Wednesday reflection gatherings throughout this Easter Season. Are you diving into God's Word? How about 'chewing' God's Word, allowing it to sit with you long enough for you to digest, reflect and process it for your spiritual strength?

Every Wednesday, at 12PM (Eastern and Pacific), starting on 17 April, 2024, we will gather for 30 minutes to reflect and share on the Gospel readings for that upcoming Sunday. This FREE half hour Zoom gathering will help carry you this season! We will have two meeting groups that meet weekly on the following dates:

April 17, April 24, May 1, May 8, and May 15, 2024.



4th Sunday of Easter -- Gospel *John* 10:11-18 (April 21, 2024)

Theme: Smell the Sheep

Challenge: Reduce clericalism, patriarchy and the top-down hierarchical Catholic Church.

Recall Pope Francis' now famous words to pastoral workers/shepherds to “smell the sheep.” We should regularly smell the sheep on the local level and even have/take on the smell of the sheep/smell like the sheep. He says that clericalism is a disease in the Catholic Church. “The spread of Bible study groups, of Ecclesial Basic Communities [also called Small Christian Communities] and of Pastoral Councils is in fact helping to overcome clericalism and to increase lay responsibility.”

In Eastern Africa SCCs (the nine countries of the AMECEA Region) we have 195,000 SCCs. They are not a program or project in the parish or in the general African religious life. They are a way of life. So we say that we are a Synodal SCC. The SCC is a communion of families. The parish is a communion of SCCs. So we live a Synodal Parish.

The diocese is a communion of parishes. So we live a Synodal Diocese. This is part of Communion Ecclesiology.

The SCCs are an official pastoral, ecclesial structure in the Catholic Church in Africa. We are disappointed that SCCs are not mentioned in the Second Vatican Council or in the Code of Canon Law. The traditional geographical parish is considered the basic juridical unit of the Catholic Church so there is no mention of subparishes, outstations, substations, chapels and SCCs, that is, nothing “smaller” or “lower” than the parish. As the African Bishops have said: “The *Code of Canon Law* is western.” This has to change.

For the first time in Vatican Synod Documents the specific term “Small Christian Communities” are mentioned twice in the Summary Report of the First Session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops -- A Synodal Church in Mission -- that was published on 28 October, 2023. In Part III: “Weaving Bonds, Building Community:”

1. No. 16 is “Towards a Listening and Accompanying Church.” Under "Matters for Consideration" m) states: “Widespread in many parts of the world, grassroots [base] or Small Christian Communities foster listening practices of and among the baptized. We are called to enhance their potential, in particular by exploring how they can be adapted to urban contexts.”

2. No. 18 is "Structures for Participation." Under "Matters for Consideration" e) states: "We are encouraged by Small Christian Communities in the Emerging Churches who live the closeness of the day-to-day around the Word of God and the Eucharist.”

Seeing It With My Own Eyes

Author Country :Tanzania

Genre Type :True Story

Location :Musoma, Tanzania

Year of Publication :

Publication :

Sub Theme :Bible, Animals, Inculturation, Evangelized by the People, Small Christian Communities

Author Name :Father Joseph Healey, MM

Author City :Musoma

=====
 St. Jude Thaddeus Small Christian Community (SCC) in Musoma, Tanzania meets every Thursday afternoon for the *Bible Service/Bible Reflection*. Sometimes the children form their own small reflection group so they can participate more freely in their own way. A reflection on *The Parable of the Lost Sheep* began with the 10 children (aged five to 14) closing their eyes, picturing a favorite animal, and then mentioning it to the small group — a giraffe, sheep, cow, gazelle, lion. Then two young boys (who actually herd their family sheep) described what it is like. This led the group into a discussion on the story *Jesus as the Good Shepherd* in *John 10*. A visiting priest (a former scripture professor) participated in this children’s small reflection group during two different weeks. He was amazed how the children were so comfortable and vocal in talking about the Gospel in their small group. Later he said: "I would not have believed this is possible if I had not seen it with my own eyes."

From The Aquinas Institute, the Catholic Campus Ministry Website of Princeton University, New Jersey, USA:

“Let us help our young Catholics to prepare themselves for a new era defined by a focus on the proclamation of the Gospel, deep formation in Scripture, and a radical focus on Jesus Christ.”

Deep formation in Scripture is agreed by most people such as our present SCCs Poll on “The best part of my Small Christian Community is:...” on our

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Global Collaborative Website
<https://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>

One choice is: “*Bible* is key and central in the SCC’s formation and activities.” In Eastern Africa this is crucial for building a SCC Model of Church. But there are different views on weekly lectionary based faith sharing, that is, reading the *Gospel* of the following Sunday and applying it to our daily life. Some say it is "essential/necessary," others "important," still others "optional." For a SCC to meet every two weeks misses the point of following the lectionary cycle.

From Kenneth Mwenda: “All glory to God.”

From Alloys Nyakundi: “I agree on the deep formation in scripture but the main challenge is on the practical part of it. How is that happening or going to happen?”

Worldwide the Catholic Church has had a long history of not appreciating the importance of the *Bible*, of saying "oh, that's the Protestants' book." We need to keep reinforcing that the *Bible* is one of the two main pillars of the SCCs Model of Church and emphasizing what St. Irenaeus said: “Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ.”

Announcement: “Advanced Missionary Discipleship Formation Seminar.”

Monday, 19 August, 2024 to Friday, 23 August, 2024

Maryknoll Mission Center at Los Altos, California, USA

Theme: “What does it mean to walk together prophetically in a polarized world?” (in the context of the Synod on Synodality).

Link: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/advanced.../>

Announcement: “Upcoming Webinar to Discuss How Bishops Can Be More Synodal in The Mission of the Church in Africa.”

Thursday 18th April 2024

Following the ongoing Synod on Synodality that aims to strengthen the Catholic Church in her mission of evangelization, a webinar scheduled for Thursday, April, 18, will deliberate on various ways in which bishops can be more synodal in the mission of the church that is emphasizing journeying together. The webinar will commence at 1600hrs EAT/ 1500hrs Rome time. Kindly register Registration Link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7N_10wzS0YXQhmBF9T5nZtjEQ...

Our SCC members are not called to be self-reverential, but to reach out to others in prayer and service. Today, Friday, on the Vatican Website these African countries are mentioned:

Chad
Congo Brazzaville
DRC
Ethiopia
Equatorial Africa
Madagascar
Nigeria

Feedback on academia.edu Website: "Your insights on Small Christian Communities is mesmerizing and a great contribution to the Catholic Church."

Other priority concerns identified by the Tanzania Synod of Bishops Committee include "The Consecrated Life and Lay Associations and Movements: A Charismatic Sign" (Chapter 10 of the *Synthesis Report*) and "The Involvement of All the Baptized" (Chapter 16 of the *Synthesis Report*). The Catholic Church of Tanzania continues to recommend the adoption of Small Christian Communities as one of the better ways to involve all the baptized in the life and mission of the Church in a synodal way. This "way of being Church" allows even those who are considered marginalized or forgotten to take an active part in it.

The main challenge that continues to exist so far is the low participation of men and the youth in meetings of Small Christian Communities compared to more active women. There is a felt need to encourage the participation of men and the youth so that they can become more active in playing their role in the Synodal Church.

On the use of cultural images, the committee observes that the Ecclesial Model of Small Christian Communities enhances a sense of community, strong family ties, a sense of mystery and sincere consideration for the poor. Small Christian Communities bring closer Christian families who can know one another, share the Catholic Faith and help one another materially and spiritually. This approach reflects the life of the Early Church as narrated in the book of *Acts of Apostles* (*Acts* 4: 32-35).

The Local Catholic Churches in Africa are reporting something "new" in the SCC Model of Church that is not seen in the Local Catholic Churches in the West. We use communion ecclesiology to explain that the neighborhood SCC is a communion of families (the domestic church) in both urban and rural areas. This will be included in the *Handbook* that we are writing for the Golden Jubilee of SCCs (1973--2023).

It is valuable to reflect deeply on this report from Tanzania to the Synod Office in Rome. How do these examples of the SCC Model of Church in Africa resonate with our own SCC experiences? For example, I appreciated more how our SCC members reach out to those who are considered marginalized or who have forgotten to take an active part in SCCs.

[Blog on "Synodality" on the Maryknoll Website:](#)

5th Sunday of Easter Gospel *John* 15:1-8 (April 28, 2024)

Theme: Union with Jesus Christ

Challenge: Make Jesus Christ the center of our lives.

The meaning of synod is “walking together.” In the Synodal Church we walk together in mission with Jesus Christ. The Gospel metaphor of “make your home in me, as I make my home in you” is a beautiful description of our relationship with Jesus Christ. A Ganda, Uganda proverb says *relationship is in the eating together* that can be the starting point for a rich eucharistic theology. In Holy Communion in receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ. We deepen our relationship with the most important person in our lives -- Jesus Christ. And we deepen the relationship with each other in the Eucharistic Community.

One homily suggests this takeaway: "As members of SCCs around the world we're trying to remain on the vine, aren't we? Do we appreciate the nourishment receive in the Eucharist? Do we seek additional sustenance in daily Mass? Sacrament of Reconciliation? Silent time with our Lord in prayer and adoration? Perhaps retreats? Regular lectionary based faith sharing in a small community? Or Bible study? The rosary? Spiritual reading? Are we trying to see Jesus Christ in the sick, poor, and vulnerable and seek opportunities to be like Christ in return? These are the life-giving ways we can remain in Jesus Christ's love and circulate that love throughout the body of Christ."

New Post Announcement: “Basic Ecclesial Communities: Fertile Ground for Social and Religious Harmony”

Arockia Rayappan, Concordia University

Abstract: Religious intolerance and blatant polarization along the lines of caste, color, and racial differences are on the rise in India, a trend that has been compounded by the explicit religious nationalism of the incumbent ruling party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). In the face of this rising intolerance and polarization, a substantial number of Indians from different demographics have begun to envision and participate in people-centred initiatives to nurture religious and social harmony. The present article proposes that Basic

“These kinds of articles show the rich diversity of the Small Christian Community Model of Church worldwide -- in this case, Basic Ecclesial Communities in India in Asia.”

Announcement -- New article: “The Main Challenges Facing the Catholic Church in 2024 and the Practical Solutions to Overcome these Challenges – From the Perspective of Young Adults in the Global South.”

Part 1: Young Seekers’ Views in their Online SCCs Gatherings

Part 2: Young Seekers’ Interviews With Other Young People

In the ongoing Synodal Process, the Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community (SCC)’s engagement has emerged as an essential and dynamic platform to discuss and address the most pressing challenges facing the Catholic Church in 2024. As the church navigates the complexities of modern times, the SCC actively contributes to analyzing and suggesting solutions to its central challenges.

“It is so, so important that the voices of Young People be heard in Africa and around the world. In our SCCs Poll this month one Young Adult from California, USA provided the choice: "Basic space where I live my faith." Go to: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org>”

From Aloysius Mugishagwe: “It was a great moment meeting the Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community again in today's 18th April, 2024 gathering. It always gives me joy when I meet with my fellow youth from almost all corners of the world as we share about strategic issues about the Catholic Church. I also like the synodality part of it as the youth find a psychological safe environment where they confidently give out their views about various topics of the day. As young people we can create a great impact in the community by fighting and solving social and environmental injustice. Great appreciation to the sponsors and our coordinator Alloys Nyakundi for playing a pivotal role in making this happen. Blessings always.”

This is a powerful witness statement from Mwanajumuiya Mary Wahome: “On the 24 March 2024, there was a Intervarsity Christian Meeting for all university Christian students in universities within Nairobi county in Kenya. Kenyatta University's three chaplaincies (Christian Union, Seventh Day Adventist and Catholic Community) received invitation letters asking them to send delegates to the meeting. I was honored to be among the delegates. It was announced that we would be leaving in the morning hours so we were to attend first mass, but after the homily, we were to leave. We all did that, though we found it so uncomfortable and we started murmurs amongst ourselves that we've not fulfilled our obligations as Catholics to receive communion on Sunday. Delays happened and those who were in for the first mass got out and found us still there. After the meeting was over, all was well till Tuesday evening. I got sick, my whole body was in pain, I didn't exactly know what was wrong. On the Friday of that week I decided to attend one of the daily masses, still unwell and after receiving the Eucharist, miraculously I became well. I don't know how it happened, but I was now well.

I shared this with a close friend of mine and he told me, " Mary, you cannot do without God, you need Him." I liken this situation to the 5th Sunday of Easter's *Gospel* where my mantra was "for without me you can do nothing." Christ being the vine and we the branches, we need him, to give us support and strength. We cannot do it alone. I tried to do without Him for a week and I learned my lesson the hard way. It is through him that we get the strength, the energy and the zeal to keep pushing on. Brothers and sisters, let us cling to Christ, just like a child clings to the mother for milk. Let us cling to Him, and we will never be disappointed, neither will we ever be ashamed about him.”

Tune in on TUESDAY, MAY 7, 2024 at 2 pm ET for the first in a three-part webinar series about the power and impact of Small Christian Communities!

It's easy to say what you think when you're engaging one-on-one or surrounded only by a few people, right? It's less intimidating and more welcoming! But how do we apply this concept to small faith-sharing groups? How do small groups evolve into Small Christian Communities?

Join us for an interactive discussion about these very topics, featuring a conversation about implementing the ideas Pope Francis presented in the Synod and the experience of actually taking part in a small-group session!

Click [HERE](#) to register today!

This webinar asks two key questions:

1. How do you evolve from a small group into a Small Christian Community and
2. How can this "community of communities" transform your parish?

"SCCs as Seeds of Synodality"

Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo, the SECAM President, also made reference to Africa's unique experience and contribution to the Synod on Synodality. "Let us bear in mind and value the typical African experiences of synodality and mission, which have made the Catholic Church in Africa grow with its own characteristics. In this process, we cannot ignore the experience of the Small Christian Communities (SCCs), which have been seeds of synodality since the time of the Second Vatican Council. These ways of being Church, typical of our continent and nourished by the philosophical principle of *Ubuntu*, have made the church grow in Africa, as a true family of God, where the forms of masses and anonymity are overcome by bonds of brotherhood, interconnection and mutual support; where the mission is not only carried out by words but above all by small gestures of attention, care, visits, sharing and the communion of feelings in different circumstances. All of this, characterizes the richness of the church in Africa, and we must have the courage to share it with the universal church," said Cardinal Ambongo.

Embracing the new way of being Church through Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and living out the spirit of "Ubuntu" are the two particular "cultural and community forces" that delegates representing the Catholic Church in Africa at the ongoing Synod on Synodality want integrated into the continental mission of the Church. This was the consensus of some 50 delegates and experts from across Africa and its Islands, who concluded their four-day meeting on Friday, 26 April 2024 at Roussel House of Donum Dei Missionary Sisters in Karen in the Catholic Archdiocese of Nairobi (ADN).

Organized by the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) in collaboration with the African Synodality Initiative (ASI), the meeting aimed at having the Synod on Synodality delegates from Africa "deepen" their insights about Synodality ahead of the 2-29 October 2024 session in Rome.

In a statement he issued on Thursday, April 25, the President of SECAM provides key highlights of the meeting that was organized under the theme, "How can we be a Synodal Church on mission?" "During our discussions on how to strengthen our synodal mission, there was consensus among delegates that Africa must embrace the experience of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and the rich philosophical principles of *Ubuntu*," Cardinal Fridolin Abomgo said.

We SCC members have to keep reminding ourselves and others of the importance of lectionary based faith sharing on a weekly, if not daily basis -- for individuals and the community. This is different from *Bible Study* that can be academic (focus on the meaning of the *Bible* text) and not related to our daily lives.

Maryknoll Missionary Disciples

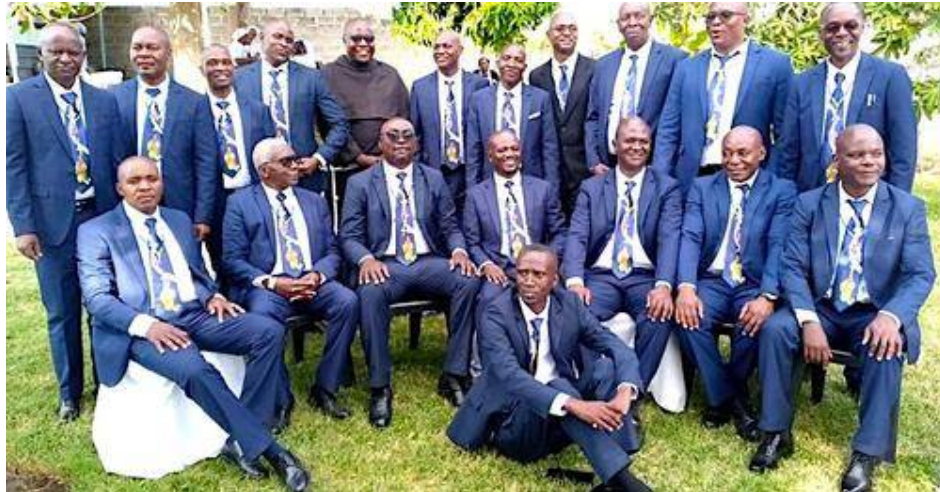
2024 Sixth Sunday of Easter

Theme: Joy of the Gospel

One of Pope Francis' most important writings is the Apostolic Exhortation *Joy of the Gospel*. The people of the Global South – Latin America, Africa and Asia – can teach us how to be joyful and happy. Julius Nyerere, the first President in Tanzania in East Africa says: “In Africa we have many problems but we remain cheerful.” We radiate the joy of proclaiming the Good News of Jesus Christ to all people and to all creation.

May SCC members around the world pray for and with the people of Kenya and Tanzania who are suffering from torrential rain, severe flooding and mudslides.

ZAMBIA: Where Are the Men in Small Christian Communities?



We congratulate Tangaza University (TU) in Nairobi, Kenya on getting an academic Charter. The university has long taught courses on SCCs and has an excellent library of SCC materials. Tangaza hosts our sister website – the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website.

During a CCRI Webinar on "Synodality" a Catholic Church leader in Austria has some interesting comments on the SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa. He praised the Golden Jubilee Celebration (1973-2023) and said it is an opportunity for a deepening of SCCs in Eastern Africa. He said that SCCs are the core of the ongoing Synodal Process.

Both Mary Wahome and Faith Makori spoke very well during the CCRI-sponsored webinar on "Synodality" on 2 May, 2024. They are an important voice of Catholic Young Adults in Africa today.

Good work Mary, Faith and all other young people who participated in the Synodal gathering.

Superb, Steven and Cecilia were in my group and they also spoke so well in terms of positive changes within the church.

In an *OSV* article Archbishop Martin Kivuva Musonde of Mombasa, Kenya said that for African bishops the family is the number one issue to fight for at the Second Session of the Synod. “In Africa, we are championing the family for the simple reason that if the family does not form its own children, does not teach them and does not support them, they will become a problem. You see, in the ways of the West, some things that are being proposed

will in the end kill the family. In fact, if you listen to (delegates from) Europe, America and other places, churches are empty. What has happened? The population is going down and there are no new births.”

SCCs are a communion of families that is the domestic church.

African delegates to the Synod also point out that African Catholic Young Adults are more active than their European counterparts -- many of whom have stopped going to church.

ANNOUNCEMENT: It is important that we continue to evaluate our SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa so we can make it better. Please vote in the current polls.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Ninety-First Round -- The best part of my Small Christian Community is:

(May – June 2024):

1. Call to respond to the suffering Jesus Christ.
2. Part of a Small Eucharistic Community.
3. Synod theme aligns seamlessly with the essence of SCCs.
4. Functional SCCs as a gift to the Catholic Church.
5. Walking together with Jesus.
6. Hallmark of the Catholic Church in Africa.

Vote at:



SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

Small Christian Communities

Small Christian Communities, Eastern Africa, church

Here is the “Blog on Synodality” on the Maryknoll Website:

Ascension Gospel Mk 16:15-20 (May 12, 2024)

Theme: We are all missionaries

Challenge: Leave our comfort zones to reach out to the marginated and those on the peripheries of society.

Everyone is a missionary. The 2023 Summary Report of the First Session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops -- A Synodal Church in Mission -- emphasizes the “Preferential Option for Young People.” The Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community based in Nairobi, Kenya shows how Young People can be digital missionaries. Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Communities | Facebook

“In the spirit of the Synod on Synodality” may our SCC members pray for two gatherings.

First, may the Holy Spirit guide our third All-Maryknoll Gathering:

"MARYKNOLL AT THE DAWN OF A NEW CREATION: A MOVEMENT IN MISSION"
FRIDAY/SATURDAY SEPT. 27 - 28, 2024
10:00 AM – 12:30 AND 2:00 – 4:00 PM DAILY

Second, two days later on Monday, 30 September, 2024 may the Holy Spirit guide the Retreat that precedes the Second Session of the Synod in Rome.

After 4 and ½ years we are having our first in-person Orbis Books Advisory Committee meeting in two weeks. Prayers. Here is what I am writing to the members:

There is a joke that if you want God to laugh, tell him your plans. Well back in December, 2019 we made wonderful plans to celebrate Orbis Books' 50th Anniversary in 2020. Then everything washed out with Covid 19. But we persevered in Africa and we published in May, 2020 a special issue No. 61 of the Hekima Review (published by Hekima University College of the Jesuits in Nairobi, Kenya) on "The Evolution of African Christian Theology." The Editorial states: "This edition of the Hekima Review is primarily dedicated to Orbis Books as she marks her 50th Anniversary." There were articles by Orobator, Magesa (RIP), Hadebe and Mugambi. For those who are interested my article on "My 50 Year Personal Journey (1970 to 2020) with Orbis Books in Africa," can be found at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/my-personal-50-year...> Let us harvest the memories.



SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

My Personal 50 Year Journey (1970 to 2020) with Orbis Books in Africa – Small Christian Communities

Small Christian Communities

It is very revealing to put the following three terms in Chat AI:

Small Christian Communities
Small Communities
Small Groups

Here is the "Blog on Synodality" on the Maryknoll Website:

Pentecost Sunday Gospel *John* 20:19-23 (May 19, 2024)

Theme: The Holy Spirit guides us

Challenge: Make the Holy Spirit the main actor in the Synodal Process.

The Steps in the Break-out Groups in the Synodal Process:

1. Opening Prayer: "We stand before you, Holy Spirit."

2. The facilitator gives some background to the Synodal Process. He or she invites participants during the gathering to speak about a specific topic/theme/question... The later sharing features deeper listening and discernment in the light of the Holy Spirit.
3. Participants reflect silently for five minutes preparing their input. Open oneself to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is one reason why the Synodal Process is different and can be very creative.
4. Each person speaks for a maximum of three minutes. There is no cross-talk.
5. Five more minutes of silent reflection. Each person takes private notes.
6. After re-reading their notes, each person shares for a further two minutes whatever has enlightened or resonated with them from the sharing of the other people. The participants are invited to consider what the Holy Spirit seemed to be calling them to, what paths are being opened and to note "inner spiritual movements" of joy or sadness, anxiety or confidence, consolation or desolation.
7. Open sharing time of about 20 minutes for "discerning and elaborating the synthesis" that is later written up by the scribe/notetaker and agreed upon by the participants.
8. Plenary Session: each scribe/notetaker presents two key points from his or her breakout group, not a summary.

We pray for the Holy Spirit to help us be Synodal SCCs, Synodal Parishes, Synodal Communities of every kind and a Synodal Church at every level.

Writing is hard work. There is a saying "writers don't write; they rewrite." I hope the Young Seekers articles for the SCCs Golden Jubilee booklet have gone through several drafts. Also conventional wisdom says that it is always good to have a second set of eyes to proof anything you write. Good luck.

Joseph Healey, "Praxis and Palaver," Book Review of *Toward a Synodal Church in Africa: Echoes from an African Christian Palaver*, *Today's American Catholic Website*, retrieved on 16 May, 2024,
<https://www.todaysamericancatholic.org/.../praxis-and...>

In her essay "*Ubuntu* and Synodality," Ngalula writes: "The option of Basic Christian Communities (BCCs)/Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is a deconstructive paradigm at the service of the revitalization of *Ubuntu*, that joins the will of God . . . [SCCs are] an experience of building the church from the grassroots, by listening to God who is speaking to all humanity through Holy Scripture. That is exactly where the People of God, the faithful of Christ, learn and experience from the grassroots the true spirit of the extended family of God, a sense of family that excludes racism, tribalism, [and] ethnocentrism."



TODAYSAMERICANCATHOLIC.ORG

Praxis and Palaver by Joseph G. Healey - Today's American Catholic

A new compendium of essays by leading Catholic African scholars shows how the concept of "palaver" contributes to the synodal process.

SCC members can celebrate Pentecost Week by practicing one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. I have chosen fortitude.

On a webinar yesterday a participant said that she wrote her term paper in a class on "Ecclesiology" at the University of Notre Dame on "House Churches in the *Acts of the Apostles*." I commented that we have been reflecting on this for 50 years in Eastern Africa, that is, the House Churches in the *New Testament* are the forerunners of our present day SCCs.

Our latest analysis and assessment of the voting pattern in our SCCs Poll is as follows:

1. Key words marked: *Bible*/Good News/Gospel/lectionary/Scripture/*Lectio Divina*/Word of God in BLACK bold; faith sharing in ORANGE bold; Pray/Prays/Prayer in BLUE bold; Synodality in GREEN bold; Jesus/Jesus Christ/Christ in RED bold; Covid in DARK BLUE bold; and Community in YELLOW bold.

2. The number of overall choices is close (839 on D: the dynamics/process/principles/classifications of SCCs and 912 on A: activities/content/outreach/practical action of SCCs). Of the top 20 choices, 18 are A and only 2 are D. This reveals a voting preference for activities, etc.

3. *Bible*-related, etc. is the most common word (28 votes). Community is the second most common word (23 votes). Faith sharing is the third most common word (21 votes). Followed by Synodality (20), Pray/Prays/Prayer (13), Covid (11) and Jesus/Jesus Christ/Christ (9).

4. There is a big difference in the choices of those who vote in person (paper and pen) and those who vote online.

One of the choices in our SCCs Poll is: "Walking together with Jesus." In the Gospel today Jesus says: "I am with you always, even until the end of the world/the end of the age."

The report of one of the Spanish breakout groups at the gathering of parish priests sponsored by the Synod Office in Rome on 2 May, 2024 said:

1. A parish might best become "a community of communities." MY COMMENT: What do they mean by "communities?" In the SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa these "communities" are: the SCCs themselves (small neighborhood communities), small ministry/apostolic activities groups and small ministry leadership groups.

1.

2. "Synodality could be the key to preserving unity and peace while allowing diversity." MY COMMENT: Here the Synodal Process ("walking together") is so important.

From Ron McCollum: "I am not sure I understand what it means to be a community of communities unless they are talking about a church with small groups they are designated as SCC groups. I find in this arrangement that the parish can still be the focal point, and these small communities really never step out on their own, independent of the parish. In a SCC group, each individual becomes responsible to be a light for Jesus where they live, work and play and to share their faith with those around them. The coming together of believers is for encouragement, strengthening and prayer so they can then return to their homes and neighborhoods to carry on their ministry to others. It is amazing what an individual can do for the kingdom of God when they allow themselves to be led and empowered by the Spirit with support from other believers. Just look at what Philip did in the book of *Acts*."

"Thanks Ron. All this is carefully explained in our free, online Ebook. Just do a SEARCH. In this SCCs Model of Church the parish church/rectory/convent/hall are no longer the center of the parish. More and more activities take place in the SCCs, from below. This is especially true in rural areas."

From Alloys Nyakundi: "I believe that to be a community of communities means that the parish itself is a community [or communion] and within the parish there are several Small Christian Communities hence making it a community of communities."

Yes, and it is important to clarify that in the Eastern Africa context these several, or even many Small Christian Communities, are geographical, that is, neighborhood SCCs.

American Maryknoll priest Michael Kirwen, MM uses the symbol of a tire to describe this new SCC pastoral approach from the grassroots up. In the traditional Hub Model the center of pastoral life is the physical parish center with the priest in charge assisted by the catechist. This is the top-down model. At this time other Maryknoll priests in Musoma Diocese stayed with this traditional model.

In the new model called the Spokes Model the People of God (the lay people) in the outstations and in the SCCs take more leadership. This is the bottom-up model. The local Council of Elders is responsible for the catechists, not the priest. There are 10 ministries (Apostolic Offices) in the SCCs on the local level like care of babies, children, youth and mothers. The Spokes Model became the SCCs Model of Church.

"Walk Together: Father Joe Healey," "Frontiers of Faith" Podcast, Pontifical Mission Societies, 24 May, 2024, 26:31 minutes. Available on Buzzsprout, Apple Podcasts, Spotify, the Pontifical Mission Societies Website, Today's American Catholic Website and Maryknoll Society Website.

<https://www.buzzsprout.com/.../14906693-walk-together...>

<https://audio.buzzsprout.com/14yg0aph7fci1ys6zhehtzrzvkw7...&>

Direct link: <https://maryknollsociety.org/podcast-frontiers-of-faith/>

Posted on: <https://maryknollsociety.org/podcast/>

Maryknoll Missionary priest Joe Healey shares his passion for the 195,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa and discusses how this successful global model can be effectively applied within the U.S. SCCs are not a program and project in the parish, but a way of life. Ideally SCCs are Eucharistic Communities. He applies the SCCs to the Gospel of Trinity Sunday (Matthew 28: 16-20, Year B). As Pope Francis says: In evolving the Synodal Church (“walking together”) we are all missionary disciples. We are called to be disciples of Christ and we are sent as missionaries and apostles. In final verse of the gospel Jesus says: "I am with you always even until the end of the world/the end of the age." The podcast suggests actionable insights and encourages the listeners to foster deeper community connections in their our own local areas.



BUZZSPROUT.COM

Walk together: Father Joe Healey - Frontiers of Faith

Tune into this week’s enlightening episode of Frontiers of Faith, where we explore the impact of Catholic mission work with our guest, Joe Healey, a devoted Maryknoll missionary. Joe shares his passion for Small Christian Communities and discusses...

I hope American-style Small Christian Communities and an American-style Small Christian Community Model of Church can take hold here in the USA. “Small Faith Communities” are mentioned in the just released “National Synthesis” of the USCCB.

On 29 May, 2024 the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) issued the "National Synthesis of the People of God in the United States of America for the Interim Stage." The synthesis marks the completion of the Interim Stage of the 2021-2024 Synod: “For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission.” The synthesis states: “Several examples of how the parish best provided a Safe Harbor were mentioned in many of the listening sessions. Parishes with numerous Small Faith Communities, Bible studies and prayer groups prove most successful in welcoming and integrating people from diverse backgrounds.” It is significant that the term "Small Communities” is entering church documents more and more.

This statement confirms the wide variety of SCCs in Eastern Africa based on age, profession, ethnic group, language and location.

Providing a practical, pastoral solution to the Eucharistic Famine/the Eucharistic Hunger is linked to allowing for married priests in the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church. Tom Reese says: “In regard to married priests, Francis gave a temporary "no" to the Synod on the Amazon, arguing that it had to be discussed by the wider church [Global Consensus]. The Synod on Synodality was the perfect place to have this wider consultation, but the possibility of married priests was barely mentioned at last October, 2023's meeting of the synod. Here I

fault the members of the synod more than Francis: Neither the bishops nor the laity at the synod made married priests a priority.”

As we prepare to celebrate the Feast of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ (the Eucharist) on Sunday, 2 June, 2024 we are reminded of the teachings of Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, one of the Bishops Founders of the SCCs Pastoral Priority in Eastern Africa, on the SCC as a Eucharistic Community. "Part of a Small Eucharistic Community" is one of the six choices in our SCCs Poll this month. Vote at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org>

Bishop Alfred Mateyu Chaima of the Catholic Diocese of Zomba, Malawi has urged children to live in communion, which will strengthen their Catholic faith in their communities. Speaking during the Eucharist celebration on the commemoration of the Holy Trinity and the first World Day for the Children at Sacred Heart Zomba Cathedral, Bishop Chaima said that through communion, children are to be bound together for a stronger Catholic faith amid other teachings in the world. “As children, you need to emulate the Holy Trinity by living in communion with others right from the family, Small Christian Community (SCC), school, and parish communities and becoming proud Catholics who are to remain in the one Holy Catholic Church for the rest of your lives,” said the bishop.

Typical Announcement in a *Parish Bulletin* in the USA:

“Bible Study”

On 29 May 2024, the Saint Joseph Bible Study Group in Paterson Diocese, New Jersey, USA capped-off the year with a brunch celebration; thankful for the fruitful year of meditating with Holy Scriptures. "Bible Study" with Father Vic will resume in the Fall.

It should be weekly year round. This is easy to do online. Let's be creative.

New comment: “It should now be weekly year round – what we call “Lectionary based Faith Sharing.” With the internet and online resources such as Zoom and Skype we are in a “new ball game.” So let's be creative. During the summer months our Bible Sharing (meditating with Holy Scriptures) is easy to do every week online.”

Monday, 3 June, 2024 is the Feast of the Ugandan Martyrs, St. Charles Lwanga and Companions. We congratulate all the SCCs who have Ugandan Martyrs as their patron saints especially St. Kizito SCC, Waruku, Nairobi that is celebrating its 20th Anniversary. A member of this SCC, Father John Siyumbu, MM is celebrating his second anniversary of ordination to the Maryknoll Missionary Priesthood. Oyee!

Sister Mary Nzilani Wambua has just finished teaching an Elective Course at Hekima University College in Nairobi, Kenya on "Small Christian Communities (SCCs): A Way of Being Church Today." There were nine students.

How I wish I knew for me also to attend the training, now I am in the pastoral office in my parish. Welcome. The course is given every year at Hekima College. Go to the Hekima College Website for more information.

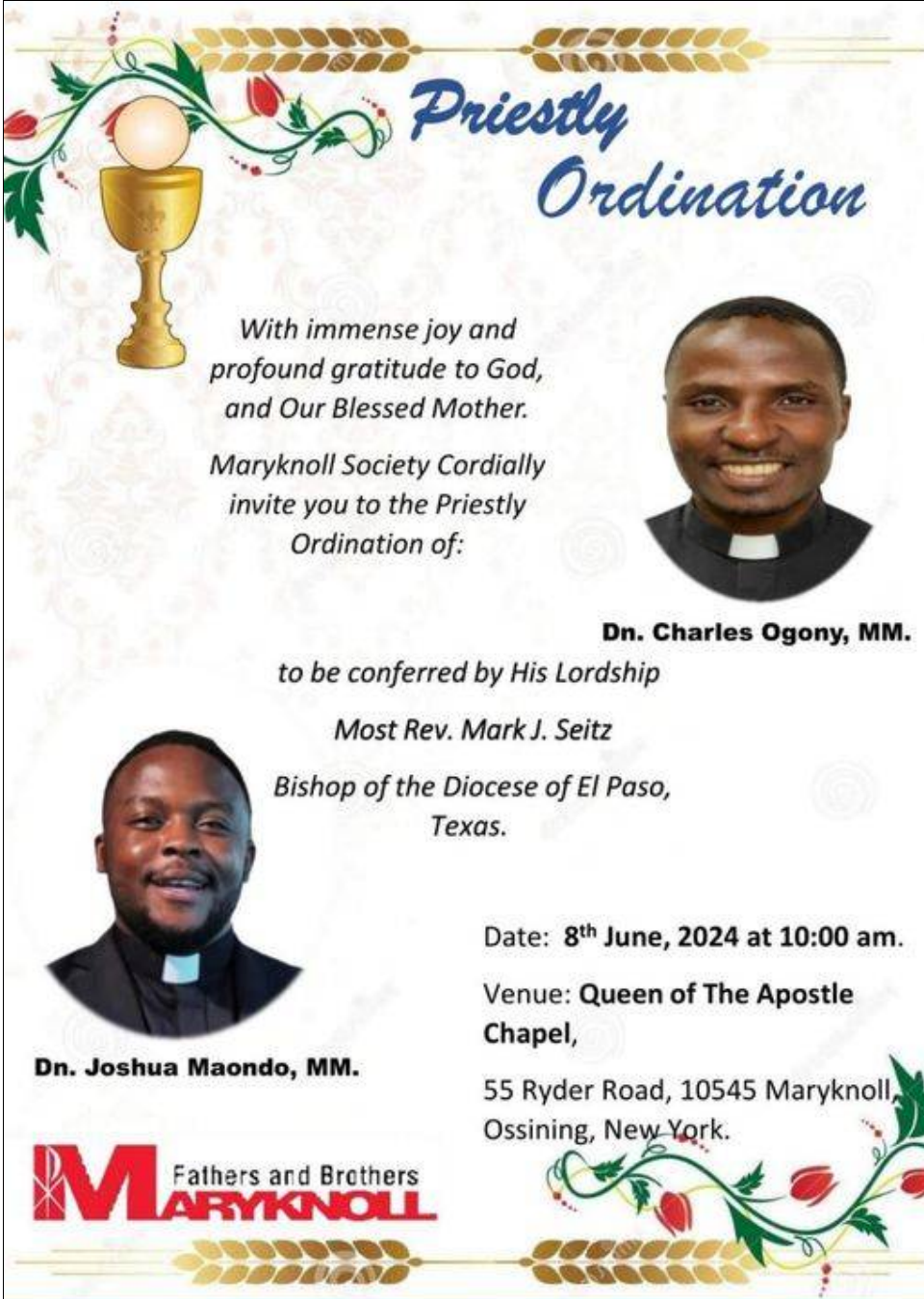
Arockia Rayappan, “Basic Ecclesial Communities: Pathways for Ecumenical Collaboration," *Vidyajyoti Journal of Theological Reflection (VJTR)*, 88:6 (2024),

<file:///C:/Users/Father%20Joe/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/Content.Outlook/JVJO7TUY/Basic%20Ecclesial%20Communities%20-%20Pathways%20for%20Ecumenical%20Collaboration.pdf>

The Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs), being centered on the Sacred Scriptures, visibly manifest the essential elements of the ecumenical fraternity. The article illustrates their historical development and theological foundations. Then it analyses the ecumenical initiatives inspired by the Decree on Ecumenism. Further, it invites the readers to view them as expressions of ecumenically diversified unity on the essentials and promotes the dialogue of life, action, discourse, spirituality, and proclamation at the grassroots. The article explores practical, resourceful, and sustainable ways to foster social and religious harmony through Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) in the contemporary Indian multi-cultural, pluri-religious, social, economic, and political milieu.

From a "special edition" of our Maryknoll Society Vocation Ministries discerner newsletter: After communion at every mass I ask the congregation to reflect silently for one minute on the meaning of Eucharist that comes from the Greek word "*eucharistia*" that means "thanksgiving." A mature, genuine Small Christian Community is a Eucharistic Community. Sadly on any given Sunday around the world for different reasons especially the lack of male, celibate priests millions of Catholics do not receive the Eucharist in a Catholic Mass. Yet the Second Vatican Council says that "the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life."


Let's join hands to pray for our brothers Joshua and Charles as they prepare for their priestly ordination. The two are *alumni* of Kenyatta University.



**Priestly
Ordination**


*With immense joy and
profound gratitude to God,
and Our Blessed Mother.*

*Maryknoll Society Cordially
invite you to the Priestly
Ordination of:*




Dn. Charles Ogony, MM.

*to be conferred by His Lordship
Most Rev. Mark J. Seitz
Bishop of the Diocese of El Paso,
Texas.*



Dn. Joshua Maondo, MM.

Date: **8th June, 2024 at 10:00 am.**
Venue: **Queen of The Apostle
Chapel,**
55 Ryder Road, 10545 Maryknoll,
Ossining, New York.



M Fathers and Brothers
MARYKNOLL

Dear Mwanajumuiya Charles and Mwanajumuiya Joshua,

Congrats on your new parish assignment in the Amazon Section of Cochabamba Archdiocese in Bolivia. This is new life and energy for the Maryknoll Society. It is great that you will be living and working with Mike Bassano.

Our SCC members in Eastern Africa accompany you and pray for and with you. In the spirit of synodality let us walk together.

I hope you can promote CEBs in your new parish. As I discussed with the Alejandro, Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga, the retired Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras has

stated that “CEBs always have to reinvent themselves in the light of the new historical, political, social and economic realities of Latin America.” This is an ongoing challenge around the world.

I leave you with one of my favorite Gospel verses: St. Paul says, “I can do all things through/in Christ who strengthens me” (*Philippians* 4: 13).

8 – 10 August, 2024: Kenya Catholic Community in America (KCCA) Convention and Swahili Mass

Thursday, 8 August – Saturday, 10 August, 2024: Kenya Catholic Community in America (KCCA) 13th Annual Convention and Swahili Mass.

St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church.

Old Bridge, New Jersey, USA.

Includes talks on Small Christian Communities.

Kenya Catholic Community in America (KCCA)

<https://kcca2012.org/index.html>

From Letter of the Chairperson: "Let me share my message of encouragement and ask all of us to keep participating and being part and parcel of the evangelization efforts, especially to our fellow Kenyan immigrants. Our cultural roots are strong let's not abandon them, and as we assimilate into the American culture, we can also share our beautiful cultural heritage. The Swahili Mass is a big plus and a great way to evangelize. Special thanks to all "Jumuiyas" (Small Christian Communities) and all the businesses from different states for their support and sponsorship of KCCA activities."



[KCCA2012.ORG](https://kcca2012.org)

KENYA CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN AMERICA

KENYA CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN AMERICA

Let us pray for Kenyan Catholics in the USA to help develop American-style SCCs.

In talking to members of the KCCA the big challenge is how to develop "weekly" SCCs. In various places in the USA the SCCs of Kenyan Catholics meet every two weeks or even monthly. To be lectionary based, that is, reading the Gospel of the following Sunday and applying it to our day lives, they have to meet weekly. In my talk and discernment

afterwards we will reflect on this issue. I will suggest: Although very busy SCC members can communicate with each other regularly, even daily, online through Chat, WhatsApp, Facetime, text messages and Email messages.

A recent article on "Tracing the Historical Development of SCCs in AMECEA states: "Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, considered as one of the bishop founders of SCCs in Eastern Africa emphasized that the setting up of Small Christian Communities formed a "decisive turning point" in the pastoral strategy of the AMECEA Countries. This renewal of pastoral method and structure was a logical consequence of a whole trend in pastoral thinking, planning and experimentation. This renewal understood profoundly the difference between breaking the Catholic Church down into small communities and building the Catholic Church up out of small communities. There is a pastoral power in building the church up out of SCCs.

From the same article came this quote: "American Maryknoll missionary priest Father Michael Kirwen, MM uses the symbol of a tire to describe this new SCC pastoral approach from the grassroots up in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania in 1966. In the traditional Hub Model the center of pastoral life is the physical parish center with the priest in charge assisted by the catechist. This is the top-down model. At this time other Maryknoll priests in Musoma Diocese stayed with this traditional model.

In the new model called the Spokes Model the People of God (the lay people) in the outstations and in the SCCs take more leadership. This is the bottom-up model. The local Council of Elders is responsible for the catechists, not the priest. There are 10 ministries (Apostolic Offices) in the SCCs on the local level like care of babies, children, youth and mothers. This Spokes Model became the SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa."

The New Orleans, Louisiana, USA Maryknoll Affiliate Chapter (a type of SCC) will have its next gathering as a Synodal Process type of "Conversation in the Spirit" on the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)'s "National Synthesis of the People of God in the United States of America for the Interim Stage." This synthesis marks the completion of the Interim Stage of the 2021-2024 Synod: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission." The synthesis states: "Several examples of how the parish best provided a Safe Harbor were mentioned in many of the listening sessions. Parishes with numerous Small Faith Communities, *Bible* studies and prayer groups prove most successful in welcoming and integrating people from diverse backgrounds." It is significant that the specific term "Small Communities" is entering into Catholic Church documents more and more.

The gathering of nine Maryknoll classmates (Class of 1966) to celebrate the 58th Anniversary of our Maryknoll Missionary Priesthood Ordination at Maryknoll, New York, USA yesterday (11 June, 2024) on the Feast of St. Barnabas was really a Small Christian Community (SCC). We began with the first part of the "Story of the Two Disciples on the Road to Emmaus" up to when Jesus says, "What things?" Then we shared our own mission stories, using the Synodal Process of deeper listening to each other. Then we discerned what God is saying in our lives right now. Then we prayed for and with all our classmates living and dead.

Pope Francis' Wednesday General Audience reflections on the Holy Spirit and the *Bible* certainly resonate with us SCC members:

"The Holy Spirit not only inspires Sacred Scripture, but also "makes them inspiring." He focused on the role of the Holy Spirit in divine revelation. However, the work of the Holy Spirit does not end with inspiration, Pope Francis explained. The Holy Spirit is continually at work in the Church to explain the meaning of Scripture and make the sacred writings "perennially living and active."

He gave the example of being inspired by a passage of Scripture that perhaps we have read many times "without emotion." "One day we read it in an atmosphere of faith and prayer," the Pope said, and "the text is unexpectedly illuminated" by the Holy Spirit.

The Church, too, "is nourished by the spiritual reading of Sacred Scripture," the Pope said, "that is, by reading under the guidance of the Holy Spirit Who inspired it." He emphasized, "The Church, the Bride of Christ, is the authorized interpreter of the inspired text, the mediator of its authentic proclamation." While highlighting the value of *lectio divina*, the practice of personal and meditative reading of the *Bible*, Pope Francis insisted that "the quintessential spiritual reading of the Scripture is the community reading done in the liturgy, and in particular in the Mass." "Among the many words of God that we listen to every day in Mass or in the Liturgy of the Hours, there is always one that is meant specially for us," he said, adding that, when "welcomed into the heart, it can illuminate our day and inspire our prayer."

Pope Francis concluded his catechesis with "a thought that can help us to fall in love with the Word of God." Citing Saint Augustine and Saint Gregory the Great, he said the Scripture is like a letter from God to His creatures, that does nothing but speak of the abundance of God's love. He prayed, "May the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures and now breathes with them, help us to grasp this love of God in the concrete situations of our life."

This reinforces the importance of our having a daily and/or weekly *Bible mantra*.

From Sarahi Unzueta: "Sharing with you all some pictures from Charles and Joshua's ordination this past weekend at Maryknoll, New York. I got to meet a few KU students and see Fr. Joe Healey again. Maryknoll has a bright future going! Asante sana!!!"









+4

Both Charles and Joshua were active in their SCCs at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya. Now they will be active in the CEBs in their new parish in the Amazon in Cochabamba Archdiocese in Bolivia.

From a Webinar on the Synod: "As mentioned by one of the speakers, one of the three expressions of the Church as Family of God is the Small Christian Communities (SCCs). I would like to add that this is part of communion ecclesiology that is one of the rich theologies in Africa. In this SCC Model of Church starting from the grassroots, from below, the family is the domestic church. The SCCs are the communion of families. The outstation is the communion of SCCs. The parish is the communion of the outstations. The dioceses is the communion of parishes. The National Bishops Conference is the communion of dioceses."

Here is an interesting comment about SCCs:

In a special way, Bishop Vincent Mwachwawa expressed gratitude to the St. Kizito Minor Seminary alumni in Malawi who were given a good formation of character and preparation for the good citizens. "The good thing about giving is that God blesses you because you become a wiser person when God has given you and you give back to him through a place like a seminary and the Catholic Church," he said. Peter Chando, chairperson of St. Kizito Alumni central region chapter stressed that as alumni, they realize that without the seminary they could not have achieved many things in life as the seminary helped them in setting a better foundation adding that it is very important to support such seminaries. "If you look in our Small Christian Communities you will see that most of the leadership positions

are taken up by the people who were in the seminaries and it's because of that formation that they got by the time they were at the seminary," Chando emphasized.

Recent research in the USA shows a wide variety of base communities (similar to SCCs) emerging from local contexts:

1. Members of the Nones Generation that meet online to share spirituality practices (not religion as such).
2. Hispanic Catholics that don't meet in the traditional parish settings.
3. Online Catholics connected to online media celebrities/personalities such as Jim Martin, Bishop Barron, Mike Schmitz on social media more than through a parish affiliation.

Thursday, 20 June, 2024, is the annual United Nations World Refugee Day. May we SCC members pray for, and reach out to, the many refugees, immigrants, migrants, and internally displaced people around the world. Pope Francis says to "welcome, promote, accompany and integrate refugees."

From CCRI Report: "USCCB Synthesis Report: One of the more encouraging reports was the great benefits of active Small Christian Communities (SCCs): "Parishes with numerous Small Faith Communities, Bible Studies, and Prayer Groups prove most successful in welcoming and integrating people from diverse backgrounds. These structures facilitate relationship-building and, thus, practice hospitality that goes beyond superficial welcoming."

We are working on a new project called "Promoting American-style Small Christian Communities (SCCs)." We are taking the worldwide SCCs Model of Church, so successful in the Global South, and adapting it to the American context (that is, inculturating SCCs in the American culture). One new development is hybrid SCCs (both in person in the parish and online). The ideal is weekly Lectionary based Faith Sharing Small Communities.

In every homily/teaching in a parish or a school every priest or deacon should mention "synodality" and the "synodal process" so that parishioners and students get familiar with this "new way of being church."

From Margaret Mary Moore: "Small Christian Communities provide the place and the environment to help young women and men have healthy relationships where they can make friends and work and pray together. This can lead to healthy marriage choices and deeper participation as committed couples in the Catholic Church."

Clyde Christofferson writes: "The Small Christian Community (SCCs) experience has been well developed (and helpfully documented in Joe Healey's continually updated free, online Ebook "Building the Church as Family of God")."

I add about 10 pages a month to our free, online Ebook:

"Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa"

http://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf

The new material is mainly added to the end of Chapter 3: "Qualitative Evaluation of the Growth of SCCs in the AMECEA Region."

This Ebook is saved on the Cloud as a Microsoft OneDrive File.

I just put “CCRI” in the Search Box and found 34 results. I just put “Synodal Way” in the Search Box and found 29 results.

During the present Synodal Process I have often wondered why, in addition to women theologians, the Catholic Church leaders, do not call more on prominent women Catholic writers for their input on change and reform in the church.

This article from *Commonweal* by Alice McDermott is thought-provoking:

"Why Not Women?
The all-male priesthood is no small matter"



COMMONWEALMAGAZINE.ORG

[Why Not Women? | Commonweal Magazine](#)

[The all-male priesthood of the Catholic Church has become an outward sign of inner corruption.](#)

In a PACTPAN Webinar Tanzanian scholar Dr. Sylvia Ruambo explored the value of participation and inclusivity, noting that African families typically operate on principles of inclusivity and participation. In African traditional families, she said, every member has a voice and a role to play. According to the value of a synodal way of working with the Catholic Church where each person operates according to their vocation is seen in the new way of being church through Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa.

Other participants at the 14 June 2024 online event agreed that sharing food, and the value of SCCs that are popular in Africa, keep the synodal dynamic alive. Fr. Joseph Healey, an American Maryknoll Missionary Priest widely known for promoting SCCs noted that one of the expressions of the Church as a Family of God in Africa is the SCCs.

Explaining communion in the Church as a Family of God in Africa, the founder of the Social Communications Department of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) said, “We begin from the grassroots; we begin from below; we begin with the family as the Domestic Church. In the Small Christian Communities Model of Church, the Small Communities are a communion of families. The parish is the communion

of SCCs, then the diocese is the communion of parishes. The National Episcopal conference is the communion of dioceses,” he said, and added, “We have a wonderful rich experience in Africa that is the SCC Model of the Church.”

Our research shows that there are seven different reasons for the worldwide Eucharistic Famine/Eucharistic Hunger. One reason is that Catholic couples have not had a sacramental marriage in church and so they can't receive the Eucharist. They have had a civil and/or traditional marriage, but they have not had a church marriage for various reasons including financial costs. One pastoral solution is to have a Group Wedding: Two examples:

1. St. Brendan & St. George Parish in Clifton, New Jersey, USA (Paterson Diocese). Nine Spanish-speaking immigrant couples (from Dominican Republic, Mexico, Peru, etc.) got married in a Communal Nuptial Mass in Spanish that grew out of the Pastoral Family Ministry, an outreach to Hispanic Families. See the excellent article “Love was all around: 9 couples brought into communion with Church at nuptial mass” by Michael Wojcik in the 20 June, 2024 issue of "The Beacon" (<https://beaconnj.org/love-was-all-around-9-couples...>) that begins with these striking words:

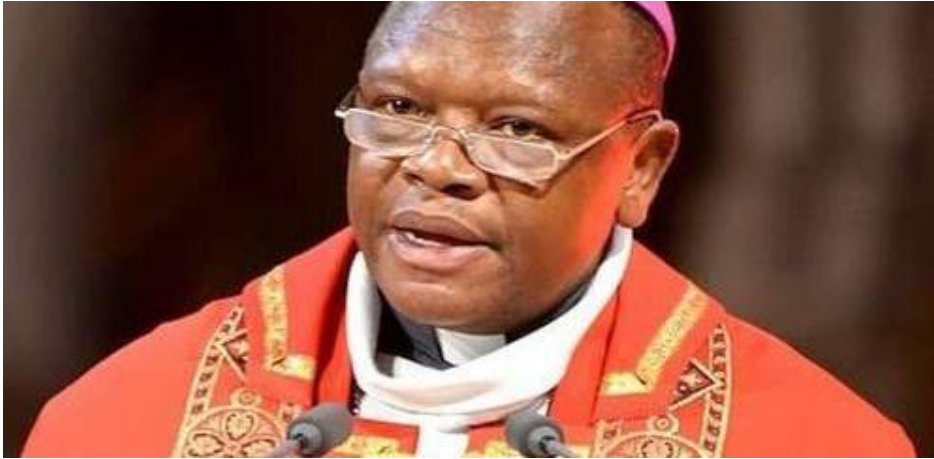
Edgar Tellez and Ruth Prado of St. Brendan & St. George Parish in Clifton felt uncomfortable at Mass when their children asked, “Why don't you receive Holy Communion?” The couple was married civilly but never in the Catholic Church. Tellez and Prado couldn't receive the Eucharist at Mass. They attended regular Mass but were ashamed they couldn't be the best examples of faith possible to their four children...

2. Statistics in Nairobi Archdiocese in Nairobi, Kenya show as many as 60% of the Catholic couples have not sacramentalized their marriages (had their marriages blessed in church). Thus they cannot receive communion. Small Christian Communities (SCCs) members help couples in arranging Multiple or Group Wedding Ceremonies (many marriages celebrated together at the same time or *ndoa za kwa pamoja* in Swahili) in their outstations and parishes to cut down on the overall expenses.

Individual SCCs are trying to help their members to find concrete, pastoral solutions to these obstacles/problems.

Materanya, Prisca, “Basic Ecclesial Communities In DR Congo Told To Reinvent Themselves To Attract Youth,” La Croix International Website, 25 June, 2025, retrieved on 25 June, 2024, <https://international.la-croix.com/.../basic-ecclesial...>

Kinshasa Archdiocese celebrated its special day for Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECS) with Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo encouraging these communities to reconnect with the youth and young people. Cardinal Ambongo was speaking during a Mass on 22 June 2024 at the Notre-Dame du Congo Cathedral for the *bayangeli* (parish leaders) from the approximately 2,000 Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) in the archdiocese in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)'s national capital. Cardinal Ambongo asked the faithful not to consider priests as "bosses." "In pastoral work, in synodality, there are no bosses," stressed the cardinal. "The priests are spiritual guides." He also asked priests to regularly participate in BEC meetings like all other members, not as masters or lecturers. The BEC is a grassroots evangelization mission entrusted to the laity by the Catholic Church.



INTERNATIONAL.LA-CROIX.COM

Basic Ecclesial Communities in DR Congo told to reinvent themselves to attract youth
Kinshasa Archdiocese celebrates

Cardinal Maradiaga used the same word "reinvent" to describe how the CEBs have to update and renew themselves in Latin America.

Sister Laura Vicuña Pereira Manso, the vice president of the Ecclesial Conference of the Amazon (CEAMA), was an auditor at the 2019 Amazon synod. We have “reinvented ourselves” as a Church in the Amazon through a range of new proposals, she says. These include an Amazon liturgical rite, expanded ministries, intercultural dialogue and bilingual education.

When Bishop Kalilombe helped start the SCCs in Eastern Africa in 1973 he said the same thing: Priests (including bishops) should participate in a SCC as an ordinary member.

SCC members in their weekly gatherings and during Sunday Mass are encouraged to read the Gospel slowly and meditatively using the Ignatian method of the “Composition of Time and Place” that engages our active imagination. We visualize the event as if we are making a movie. We place ourselves in the scene and lose ourselves in the story. We attend to the details -- the sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings of the event. This works well for the two miracle stories in the Gospel for next Sunday, the Thirteenth Sunday in the Ordinary Time, Year B (30 June, 2024): the raising of the little girl (“just have faith”) and the cure of the woman with a hemorrhage (“your faith has saved you”).

Catholics have said that they read and experience a Gospel story in a new way after they have:

1. Visited the Holy Land (Israel) and the places Jesus traveled.
2. Seen the dramatic movie *The Chosen*.

May all our SCC members pray for and with all the young people in Kenya, especially the students, who were killed or injured in the demonstrations this week.

Cardinal Grech has introduced a new word in Synodality: the principle of "circularity" (what comes from the grassroots returns to the grassroots) that animates the entire synod process. This describes our SCC Model of Church as well.

From "These African theologians are all in on the synod—and want to make it a permanent part of the church": | article in *America Magazine* by Jim Keane: "Religious practice -- defined not only as mass attendance, but participation in sodalities, Small Christian Communities and other forms of religious expression -- is far more robust in the Catholic Church in Africa than most of the Catholic world."

As Keane states, the sodalities are most common in Nigeria and Ghana, the Small Christian Communities are most common in Eastern Africa, DRC and select African countries and other forms of religious expression are seen throughout the continent.

As we SCC members plan for the future, there is a clear invitation to link the current ongoing Synodal Process more closely to the path of preparation for the Jubilee Year in 2025 (theme of "Hope"), first and foremost through prayer.

We continue our Forum on Synodality and the Synodal Process. One ongoing discernment is lay people including women giving homilies at Mass. Another is more involvement of lay people in the preparation of the priests and deacons' homilies at mass. At the annual assembly of the Association of US Catholic Priests (ASUSP) in Lexington, Kentucky, USA in June, 2024, there was a question on increasing opportunities for women's ministry. Dr. Kim R. Harris, assistant professor of African American Thought and Practice in the theology department at Loyola Marymount University, suggested that priests gather "conversation partners" for their homily preparation. Using the lectionary, these "partners" could reflect on the week's readings and communicate to priests "how they are received by a diversity of people." (see Report in *Today's American Catholic*).

"We create the path by walking."

Some feedback: "I think a lot of people are picking up on the idea of shared responsibility for homily preparation based around the lectionary readings. It's something that fits naturally with SCC practices."

More feedback: "Maybe you could talk to the Holy Family Parish team about the TAC SCC being a "conversation partner" for homily preparation?"

I have talked with many priests and most prefer to prepare their homilies alone. I am baffled why. The SCC way of preparing a homily is a Win-Win for me.

ANNOUNCEMENT: It is important that we continue to evaluate our SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa so we can make it better. Please vote in the current polls.

Ninety- Second Round- The best part of my Small Christian Community is:
(July – August 2024):

1. Seeds of Synodality.
2. Sacred space to unburden ourselves.
3. Living together as church in the neighborhood.
4. Community of believers on mission.
5. Encourages friendship with Jesus Christ.
6. Home away from home.

Vote at: <https://smallchristiancommunities.org/>



SMALLCHRISTIANCOMMUNITIES.ORG

Small Christian Communities

Small Christian Communities, eastern africa, church

It is significant that these choices in our poll come from the grassroots experience of SCC members themselves.

Alloys Nyakundi wrote: "Thank you for sharing the new poll. I like Number 2 which talks about the "sacred space to unburden ourselves." I responded: "This Number 2 -- "sacred space to unburden ourselves" -- was offered by a Young Adult who finds a peer-group SCC a safe place to share her journey."

Alloys Nyakundi added: "I'm so glad to hear that this Number 2 came from a young person. Through the lived experiences and challenges young people are going through here in Kenya, I can tell that we need a sacred space to unburden ourselves. I hope SCCs from different parts of the world will adapt to the new changes and make a sacred space for young people to share their burdens."

Here is a comment during a Webinar on Synodality: "We have structures like the SCC or the BCC. But how truly pastoral are they? Do they reach out systematically? What comes to my mind, in comparison, are how the "cells" of the Pentecostal Churches reach out to their members and end up experiencing a real sense of communion and community. Our Catholic pastoral approach needs to change too. We have all it takes. However, we need to do more and better."

On this great feast of Saints Peter and Paul (Saturday, 29 June, 2024) let us pray in solidarity with all SCCs named after these two great missionary saints.

By ACI Africa Staff

Lindi, 30 June, 2024 / 11:39 pm (ACI Africa).

For Faith to Grow, "We Must Return to the Small Christian Communities": Catholic Bishop in Tanzania

The Small Christian Community (SCC), the new way of being church in Africa, is instrumental in the growth of Christian faith, Bishop Wolfgang Pisa of Tanzania's Catholic Diocese of Lindi has said. In his homily during the Eucharistic Celebration to mark the conclusion of the Golden Jubilee Year of SCCs in the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA), Bishop Pisa explained the essential nature of SCCs in the structure of the Catholic Church in the region. "Today, as we celebrate 50 years (since the establishment of SCCs), we still hold the idea that if we want our faith to continue to take root, we must go to the family; we must go to the Small Christian Community," he said during the 26 June 2024 event that was held at St. Walburga Nyangao Parish of the Catholic Diocese of Lindi.

The Tanzanian Catholic Bishop further said, “To easily reach our Christians, to make them participate well in pastoral work, and to strengthen our faith, we must return to the Small Christian Communities.” “We cannot build faith at the parish level only; we cannot mark celebrations of our Sacraments at the Diocese or parish level alone; it is impossible. We must go to the family and to the Small Christian Communities,” he emphasized during Holy Mass to conclude of the Golden Jubilee Year of SCCs in AMECEA.

AMECEA launched the Golden Jubilee Year of SCCs last August, 2023 to assess the status of this new way of being church in the region. Starting from the 19 August 2024, the people of God in the nine member countries of AMECEA were to reflect on the goals that Catholic Bishops in the region had when they founded SCCs in 1973.

In his keynote address at the launch in Malawi, Bishop Rogatus Kimaryo of Tanzania’s Catholic Diocese of Same and Chairman for AMECEA Pastoral Department said that the yearlong celebrations were to reawaken the spirituality of SCCs in the region. “By December 2023, it will be 50 years since the Small Christian Communities were adopted by the AMECEA Region as a key pastoral priority,” Bishop Kimaryo said at the launch of the Golden Jubilee celebrations of SCCs in AMECEA on 19 August 2023 in the Catholic Diocese of Dedza, Malawi.

In his 26 June 2024 homily, Bishop Pisa recalled that in establishing SCCs, AMECEA leadership had in mind, among other reasons, the need to create an easier way of reaching Christians, strengthening their faith, and making them participate well in pastoral work. “Small Christian Communities can inform the priest which family or person needs to be visited, needs to be strengthened more, and who is suitable to be a leader,” he said, adding that “leadership in church starts from the family” and that the SCC “helps in identifying who is suitable to be a parish leader.”

It is significant that Bishop Pisa, the new Chair of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC), has made such a strong, supportive statement on SCCs. It is important that the younger generation of Catholic Bishops in Eastern Africa are supporting SCCs.

For the full text go to: https://www.aciafrica.org/news/11268/for-faith-to-grow-we-must-return-to-the-small-christian-communities-catholic-bishop-in-tanzania?utm_campaign=ACI%20Africa&utm_medium=email&_hsenc=p2ANqtz-8j68zRmvFcZ-4rpWn5PFsBrsYhy6qX2_PQdQhNGIXbqvSoL5Ry6hidport9xUU3kWvot1EbJpnL0fyUHO T8NfVKDj8Q&_hsmi=313901637&utm_content=313901637&utm_source=hs_email

SCC members have a clear invitation to link the current 2021 -- 2024 Synodal Process more closely to the path of preparation for the Jubilee Year in 2025 with the theme of “Hope”. *Romans 5:5* says "hope does not disappoint". Our first and foremost ministry is through prayer. Then through other Jubilee activities.

From Jesca Donisan: “The Young Catholic Workers (YCW) Movement recently held a transformative gathering in Kigoma, Tanzania, organized by AMECEA. I got the opportunity to share with my fellow young people about the importance of participating in and attending Small Christian Communities as the best way to evangelize.” The worldwide Young Catholic Workers (YCS) Movement was one of the founders of the "See, Discern and Act" Reflection Method and the importance of Small Reflection Communities.

Welcome to the 5th African Palaver session hosted by PACTPAN on Friday, July 5, 2024. We will convene to prepare for the Second Session of the Synod on Synodality,

focusing on shaping a Synodal Church in Mission in Africa. Joining us will be Cardinal Ameyu (South Sudan), Mrs. Brigit Itsueli (Nigeria), and Fr. Callisto Locheng (Uganda). Together, our goal is to foster a participatory and missionary Church through dialogue and reflection, exploring how synodality can renew and enrich the Church's mission in Africa

Africa Prepares for the Synod on Synodality

HOW TO BE A SYNODAL CHURCH IN MISSION IN AFRICA

Friday, 5th July 2024
5 PM EAT, 4 PM Rome, 3 PM Nigeria

Meeting ID: 81105097528
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Learn More: <https://pactpan.org/synodal-conversations/>

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In the second hour of the Zoom Webinar there will be two Young Adult Presenters: a young man from the Republic of the Congo (ROC) -- Congo Brazzaville --and a young woman from Eswatini (formerly Swaziland). The “Summary Report” of the First Session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops -- A Synodal Church in Mission -- emphasizes the “Preferential Option for Young People.”

This is an opportunity to explain how the SCCs Model of Church is an important part of synodality in Africa today.

The “Concept Note” for this 5th African Palaver Session on “How Can We Be a Synodal Church on Mission in the Church Family of God in Africa” sponsored by PACTPAN on 5 July 2024 states:

Indeed, theologians, religious communities, lay groups, organizations, movements, Catholic schools, social agencies, Small Christian Communities, sodalities, Catholic families and all people in different sectors of life both Catholics and non-Catholics are invited to engage the convergences, proposals, and matters for consideration from the Synod in a more concrete and direct way.

It is encouraging that SCCs are now recognized as an important entity in their own right in the ongoing Synodal Process.

In his closing remarks at the end of this 5th African Palaver session sponsored by PACTPAN Cardinal Wilfrid Napier of South Africa said that in preparing for the Second Session of the Synod gathering in Rome in October, 2024 "we have to go back to the basics," that is, to emphasize the Church as the Family of God -- both the spiritual aspects and the human, relational aspects. As Teresa Okure pointed out this is both to strengthen the Catholic Church as the Family of God in the African context and to contribute to, and impact, its fundamental meaning and practice in the Universal/World Church with "our own African God-given native (local) values of family, ubuntu, togetherness, etc.”

Reading and discerning "the signs of the times" the secular world does not respect the institution of the family and family values. There is even less respect for marriage and a person giving himself or herself to another person in a permanent lifetime commitment. In a recent document the Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) stresses the need for EU policymakers to prioritize family values and Christian ethics in a digital world. There are some key challenges posed by digitalization on family dynamics such as social isolation, mental health issues, digital addiction, online risks for children, and on a vaster scale, its cultural and societal impacts affecting traditional Christian and family values.

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) fit into both the Institutional Catholic Church and the Charismatic Dimension of the Catholic Church:

1. In the context of Communion Ecclesiology SCCs are an official, pastoral, ecclesial structure. The family is the domestic church. The SCC is a communion of families. The outstation/mission station is a communion of SCCs. The parish is a communion of outstations/mission stations. The SCCs are integrally linked to the parish.

2. Many of the ecclesial movements and lay associations use small faith sharing communities/small reflection communities as part of their formation and educational structure and practice. Examples: Christian Life Communities (CLCs) [formerly called Sodalities]; Catholic Charismatic Movement; Neo-catechumenal Way; Communion and Liberation; Focolare; Grail Movement; International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS); Young Christian Students (YCS); Young Christian Workers (YCW); Sant'Egidio; and Taize.

The SCC Model of Church has existed in Africa for a long time and is an expression/manifestation of synodality. We do not like to use the word "movement" to describe the experience of SCCs. The Brazilian theologian Father José Marins says that Basic Ecclesial Communities/Small Christian Communities “are not a Movement in the Catholic Church, but the Church on the Move.”

At a conference that brought together a section of Bishops from the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) region and other clerics dealing with protection of minors in dioceses, a Vatican official has appreciated the move by the region in their commitment to safeguarding children, minors and the vulnerable. The Secretary to the Pontifical Commission for the Protection of Minors (PCPM), Bishop Luis Manuel Ali Herrera, who began his mandate this year in mid-March, 2024 acknowledged in his address to the participants on Tuesday, 2 July 2024 that Small Christian Communities (SCCs) which is a small group of Christian believers who meet regularly to share the Word of God and help each other grow in faith, is a strong pillar for the AMECEA region in promoting safeguarding issues...According to the Vatican official, “The visionary leadership in the AMECEA region supported by the church’s structure from the Small Christian Communities to the Conference level, is strategic as families are the foundation for child protection.”

"AMECEA: Bishops in AMECEA Commit to Strengthen Families, Enhance Safety of Children and the Vulnerable"



By Sister Jecinter Antoinette Okoth, FSSA

After a three-day training conference for bishops and safeguarding practitioners from the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA), Catholic Bishops have promised among other commitments to strengthen families through the vibrant Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the region to safeguard children and the vulnerable adults.

In a press statement read Thursday, 4 July, 2024, by the AMECEA chairman Bishop Charles Sampa Kasonde after the conclusion of the training, the delegates from the region and its affiliate country of Djibouti acknowledged that children and young people make up a significant proportion of AMECEA's population and the Catholic Church has a responsibility

to care for them. “The church will work through Small Christian Communities to strengthen the capacity of families and children and enhance values and morals to ensure everyone’s safety,” Bishop Kasonde of Solwezi Diocese read the statement while flanked by other delegates from the region highlighting that they will strive to continually enhance the capacity of pastoral agents, staff, and affiliates at all levels, including national conferences and dioceses to better uphold the principles of safeguarding.

How does the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa grow from the bottom up, from the grassroots up? Before its establishment in 2022, St. Joseph’s Sunuzi Parish was under St. Paul’s Matiya Parish run by religious priests of St. Vincent de Paul. The bishop of the Catholic Diocese of Zomba, Malawi has applauded local Catholics in the diocese for building a new outstation church, called Christ the King Church, located in Bandawe under the new parish of St. Joseph, Sunuzi. He has advised the congregants to take good care of their new church by ensuring that all the facilities are not vandalized and to have vibrant Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and groups that will help them cement the Catholic faith.

What is Africa’s unique contribution to the Second Session of the World Synod in Rome in October, 2024? I would like to build on Clyde’s continuing emphasis on starting with our experience at the grassroots, starting from below.

Cardinal Robert McElroy is one our best. He is a strong supporter of Pope Francis and the Synodal Process. Yet in a speech published in a new Orbis Book he says: “The current Synodal Process is an ongoing process of reform and renewal that constantly enhances ecclesial life from the parish to the diocese to the world church.”

This is the same old language of Vatican Two and the *1983 Code of Canon Law*. In structural terms nothing lower than, and below, the parish.

I think the African Church would say: “The current Synodal Process is an ongoing process of reform and renewal that constantly enhances ecclesial life from the family to the Small Christian Community to the parish to the diocese to the world church.”

This is a big difference.

Comments are welcome.

People often ask: “What do SCC members do?” In the last two weeks we have posted on our SCCs Facebook Page concrete examples of SCC members’ ministry/activities in:

- building a new outstation church.
- safeguarding children (families as the foundation for child protection), minors and the vulnerable.
- promoting Small Faith Sharing Communities/Small Reflection Communities.
- strengthening the Church as the Family of God through our own African God-given native (local) values of family, ubuntu, togetherness, etc.
- explaining how the SCCs Model of Church is an important part of synodality in Africa today.
- showing how Small Christian Communities are the best way to evangelize Young People.
- helping to identify who are suitable parish leaders.
- informing the priest which family or person needs to be visited.

- Posting a new SCCs Poll with the choices coming from the grassroots experience of SCC members themselves.

This list clearly shows that SCCs are not a project or a program in the parish, but a way of life.

How To Be a Missionary Synodal Church, “Instrumentum Laboris” (Working Document) for the Second Session (October 2024), XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, Rome, Italy
<https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly2024/il/ENG-INSTRUMENTUM-LABORIS-A4.pdf>

- No. 7. Synodality works through the community listening to the Word of God.
 No. 29. Men and women who exercise the ministry of coordinating a Small Church Community.
 No. 89. The contributions submitted by the Episcopal Conferences speak of Parishes, Base Christian Communities and Small Christian Communities as contexts of communion and participation in mission... The parish is understood as a community of communities in the service of missionary creativity.
 No. 94. Creating networks of Pastoral Councils at the level of Base Christian Communities, Small Christian Communities, Parishes and Deaneries right up to the Diocesan Pastoral Council.

“I’m happy the working Synod working document is out and it’s time for the lay people to read and give feedback. Thanks so very much for sharing the working document.”

“Yes, especially let us get feedback from Young People.”

“No. 89 indicates that the Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa contributed.

This is feedback from Alphonse Omolo: "Thank you for sharing the link to the *Instrumentum Laboris*. This time, the emphasis on Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as a pathway to nurturing synodality in the Catholic Church is particularly significant. Will the Church in the Western world follow up on this at a local level? Only time will tell. Similarly, will the Church in Africa strengthen the foundation of synodality rooted in the experience of local SCCs? Again, time will be the judge. My hope and prayer is that the church will invest in nurturing SCCs by incorporating them as critical course modules in seminaries and colleges. Despite ‘preaching’ this for decades with little outcome to write about, we remain hopeful and prayerful."

In August, 2024 I will give a talk at a conference on "How To Grow American-style SCCs." Hopefully this will be a spark in the Western world follow up on the local level.

No. 34 of the new "Instrumentum Laboris" -- *How To Be a Missionary Synodal Church* -- says: “It seems appropriate to create a recognized and properly instituted ministry of listening and accompaniment which would make this characteristic feature of a Synodal Church an enduring and tangible reality.”

This is not new. Do the big people in Rome know that we have had a Ministry of Accompaniment for nine years in Eastern Africa – ever since the two World Synods on “Family” in 2014 and 2015?

In our free, online Ebook on SCCs we have an “APPENDIX: 28 Online E-Resource Materials on the On-going Formation and Training of Small Christian Community (SCC) Leaders and Members.” No. 3 is “Lay Ecclesial Ministries in Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa.” It states:

Over the years lay ecclesial ministries in SCCs in Eastern Africa have evolved in responding to the contemporary signs of the times. After Vatican II for many years in the Catholic Church there was a lively debate about the use and meaning of the word “ministry.” Certain people did not want to use the name “minister” for a lay person, but it is widely accepted now. The popular usage today includes the legitimacy and importance of non-ordained lay ecclesial ministries officially recognized by the Catholic Church. In some cases there is an official installation or induction.

Here are two examples.

No. 5: Adult Catechumenate (RCIA) Pastoral Accompanier.

No. 8: Marriage Ministers that goes by many names. Ideally includes a committed, experienced Catholic couple:

- a. Single Mother Pastoral Accompanier.
- b. Marriage Animators (before and after marriage like a Formation Animator). Includes Marriage Pastoral Accompaniers (before and after marriage). Also referred to as Marriage Mentors after marriage.
- c. Marriage Counselor (after marriage).

Comments are welcome.

Post from Francis Njuguna: "Where are the men in SCCs? We need to pray hard for this phenomenon so that the women will not always be more than men in a given Catholic gathering. A study carried out in the Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya showed that in a given Small Christian Community (SCC) three quarters of the gathering would always be women. I have experienced/witnessed this in my SCC ("Mwaki" in Gikuyu) in the Catholic Church of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Church. In our St. Catherine SCC the women are always more than the men. My hope is that this kind of scenario will change."

Thandeka Matse from Eswatini (formerly Swaziland) in an online webinar: “We can deepen the faith and spirituality of young people through robust faith formation programs like retreats and workshops that will help the youth focus on prayer, reflection, and community services. Creating youth ministries like ‘Youth for Christ’ will help in discipleship and evangelization among the youth. Bible study groups on "Lectio Divina" can be formed to help in meditative and prayerful reading of Scripture for an encounter of God’s word at a personal level for the young people.”

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Our web administrator is:

Mr. Bernard Mberere
 Project Officer
 Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) Secretariat
 P.O Box 21191-00505
 49 Gitanga Road, Nairobi, Kenya
 +254 720 479 71

We encourage creativity. A SCC in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA (a Maryknoll Lay Affiliate Chapter) is trying something for the first time -- integrating some of the steps of the Conversation in the Spirit Methodology of the Synodal Process with the steps of the weekly Lectionary Based Faith Sharing methodology of a SCC. Two examples:

After the Prayer to Holy Spirit [few moments in silence]:

1st Sharing: How is God-Spirit speaking to you by way of the Gospel and/or the commentary re: the theme/question: [cf: Third step from the Conversation in the Spirit Methodology – each person 3 minutes; no cross talk/discussion].

2nd Sharing: What struck you by the sharing of someone else (give name) during the 1st Sharing? This is “other focused; not to add further thoughts of your own. “What did someone else share that struck you?” [cf: Fourth step from the Conversation in the Spirit Methodology – each person 1-2 minutes; no cross talk/discussion].

Discernment for Action: We are now invited to engage in dialogue on the basis of what has been shared; we discern and try to hear what is being said to us as a group so that we can move forward in a common direction. We ask ourselves: “What step(s) might the Holy Spirit be calling us to take together?”

In his presentation during a 11 July 2024 virtual event on "Synodality," Father Anthony Makunde, the AMECEA Secretary General, underscored the need for members of the Lay Associations and the Ecclesial Movements of the Laity to foster collaboration, first among themselves, and then beyond their membership, being in communion with members of the Small Christian Communities (SCCs), parishioners, the diocese and the entire human race. Our free online Ebook documents problems especially with the Catholic Charismatic Movement and the Neocatechumenal Way.

The *AMECEA Online Newsletter* had a similar report: "Addressing over 100 online participants Thursday, July 11, Fr. Anthony Makunde pointed out that collaboration of these charisms with one another and with other faithful in all levels of the church right from Small Christian Communities (SCCs) to Parishes and Dioceses is essential for 'the benefit of the entire church.'"

One of the choices in our Online SCCs Poll this month is: The best part of my Small Christian Community is:.. “Sacred space to unburden ourselves.” But we have to realize this is not just a Christian spiritual experience. In the secular world we have stories like:

Online spaces create community for spiritual yoga practitioners

Yoga churches, and the people who lead them, represent the evolving landscape of spirituality in America, blending ancient wisdom with modern practices to create a supportive community for seekers of all backgrounds.

Sam Kalimba, "MALAWI: Forty-five Small Christian Communities Epitomize Jubilee in Synodality," "AMECEA Online News," Issue 552: 12 July 2024. Retrieved on the AMECEA Website, 13 July, 2024

<https://communications.amecea.org/.../malawi-forty-five.../>

The AMECEA Region is still in its Golden Jubilee Year celebrating 50 years of the life of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) while journeying together in synodality. Over 3,000 members of the 45 SCCs that form St. Andrew Kaggwa Parish in the Archdiocese of Lilongwe, Malawi all came together in one place on Sunday, 7 July, 2024 to honor the parish's patron saint and epitomize the jubilee celebrations.

St. Andrew Kaggwa Parish was opened on 1 January, 1993 by the late Bishop Mathias Chimole who was the bishop of Lilongwe. It started with 600 Christians and 200 catechumens. The 2013 Diocesan Census indicated that St. Andrew Kaggwa had over 17,000 Christians in 10 outstations. In 2023 the Archdiocese of Lilongwe made two of the outstations into a stand-alone parish leaving the parish with the four outstations (church centers) of St. Kizito, St. John Maria Vianney, St. Mark and St. Andrew Kaggwa

A cross-section of uniformed lay Christians with the clergy and the religious at the celebration in the photo.



DRC lay woman theologian Leo Lushombo is prominent among the African theologians in the ongoing Synodal Process. She stresses the importance of theological training for lay people especially women. Her Book Review of *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III* in the March, 2018 issue of the important American theological journal *Theological Studies* has this very challenging statement:

"If the model or paradigm of the future is that of Small Christian Communities, as the book argues, then there is a need for the SCCs to undertake consistent theological formation/training because the laity do not have opportunity to access theological formation/training in many African countries."

From Gerald Grudzen, PhD: "Maryknoll can play a key role as an interlocutor in the emergence of new structures of the Catholic Church in Africa such as the role of Small Faith Communities, new patterns of ministry formation, and diverse theological platforms and paradigms for educating male and female religious leaders in the Global South. Maryknoll is now interdependent with the church in Africa for the foreseeable future since many of its recent priestly candidates have come from Africa. Our Maryknoll Kenya Affiliate chapter is playing a constructive role in interfaith dialogue, community development, new

forms of theological education, and building a beloved community based on the teachings of Pope Francis' encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*.

It is good to point out that SCCs are an official, ecclesial structure in the Catholic Church in Africa.

Synodality means walking together. It is encouraging that the Local Churches around the world are learning from each other about the importance of SCCs. Here is a new message from the Pacific Islands: "I am Archbishop Peter Chong from the Archdiocese of Suva in the nation of Fiji in the Pacific Ocean. Since I was appointed Archbishop of Suva I have made Small Christian Communities the archdiocese's priority mission praxis. I bought some resources from the Lumko Institute (South Africa). I will appreciate if you could kindly inform me of resources that will help us to strategically plan for the ministry around SCCs. I look forward to your support."

Pope Francis' words can inspire our SCC members: "The Gospel tells us about Jesus sending His disciples 'two by two' on mission and advising them to take only what is necessary. Let's pause for a moment on this image: the disciples are sent together and must take only what is necessary with them. The Gospel is not announced alone, but together, as a community."

This reminds me of one of the choices in our SCCs Poll this month: "Community of believers on mission."

Someone asked the important question: How are SCCs "Church"?

This comes from our free, online Ebook on the application of communion ecclesiology:

American theologian Maryknoll Father Michael Kirwen, MM stresses the importance of one's theology of church. The SCC only becomes vital and the nucleus if the theology of church operative in the parish sees it as the foundation of the church, the basic building block of the church, the "little church." Otherwise the SCC is just another traditional society, apostolic group or parish organization like the Legion of Mary. I think most pastors still in fact deal with and conceptualize the SCC as a club, even though they might give a verbal acknowledgement of their building block nature. Another distinction is that these traditional societies, apostolic groups and parish organizations have their own special charisms in the church while SCCs are part of the very nature of the church.

The well-known Brazilian theologian Father José Marins states: "The BCC is the whole church in a concentrated form. Or to put it another way, it is a germ or a seed which has within itself all the essential elements of the Church of Jesus." Marins also points out that one of the main differences between SCCs and traditional societies/apostolic groups/parish organizations/movements is that the former inculturate from the bottom up (emerge and evolve according to local situations and needs), while the latter normally follow a universal plan from the top down, for example, the International Constitution of the Legion of Mary that is applied everywhere.

Irish Salesian priest Father James O'Halloran adds:

There is a helpful analogy regarding the small community possessing all the characteristics of the universal church. In a loaf of bread we find a variety of ingredients: flour, salt, water, yeast. Now if we break off a tiny piece, we find the same ingredients in the piece as in the entire loaf. Just so the Small Christian Community has all the ingredients – characteristics – of the universal church.

Filipino Bishop Francisco Claver, SJ Claver's comment about the Philippines fits the Eastern Africa situation:

The hardest obstacle to overcome concerned the nature of BECs. Repeatedly it has to be said that it is not just another movement like the Cursillo or the Charismatic. Nor was it just another movement like the Knights of Columbus or the Catholic Women's League and hence in competition with these more established bodies. It had to be clearly shown it is church itself, the exemplar of a church of communion at the lowest levels of the church.

In our "Forum" Section a person writes: "I wish there would be some delineation of the three or four essential characteristics that make the SCCs church." We reply: "This has been done in our ongoing depth research. In our free, online Ebook there is: "The APPENDIX: 28 Online E-Resource Materials on the On-going Formation and Training of Small Christian Community (SCC) Leaders and Members." No. 2 is "31 Criteria to Evaluate a Typical Small Christian Community (SCC) in Eastern Africa." "Criteria" is equal to "characteristics."

Go to: https://smallchristiancommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Build_new.pdf

In our St. Isidore of Seville Online SCC Skype Page we have a Chat Room where members post various messages: Today Sister Rita Ishengoma posted: "We need EDUCATION. Do our CATHOLICS know what are SCCs in their life? What about SYNODALITY? THERE ARE MANY THINGS WE TAKE FOR GRANTED. IT IS TIME TO STUDY THE GOSPEL AND LISTEN AND CHOOSE THE CORRECT PATH. WHAT DOES JESUS WANT ME TO DO AND FOLLOW THAT."

We continue to discern the deeper meaning and practice of Synodality and the Synodal Process. The best question at the Press Conference presenting the 2024 "Instrumentum Laboris" was: "What does it mean that four white European males [all priests] are presenting this universal document of the World Church?"

When asked about the rationale for this, Luxembourg Cardinal Jean Claude Hollerich, who serves as relator-general of the synod, said that greater diversity is "the ideal situation where we want to go," but that the four European clerics at the dais are "the actual situation."

This is a good insight and a clear indication of how far we have to go.

In his latest 18 July 2024 article in *NCR* on "We Need To Experience Synodality To Truly Understand It," Tom Reese writes:

Although the synod will not consider the possibility of married priests or women deacons and priests, it is open to greater involvement of

laity in church ministries, such as "the ministry of coordinating a small church community, the ministry of leading moments of prayer (at funerals or otherwise), the extraordinary ministry of communion, or other services not necessarily liturgical." The working paper notes that in the Latin church, laypeople can be delegated to do baptisms and weddings. Church rules could also be changed to allow laypeople to preach at Mass."

Let us move from theory to action:

1. Ministry of Coordinating a Small Church Community that in Eastern Africa we call a Small Christian Community. This "coordinator" goes by many different names in the nine AMECEA countries including Animator, Moderator, Facilitator, Leader, etc. Thank goodness we have dropped "Chairperson." In some parishes this person is officially installed/commissioned, even by the bishop. Training and updating is required.

2. Ministry of Preaching. Can we just get started and give special training to lay people -- including women -- and have them officially installed/commissioned to preach at mass including Sunday Eucharistic Celebrations. Then encourage them to prepare their homilies in a team approach like participating in a weekly SCC that reads the Sunday Gospel a head of time and applies it to our daily lives.

Let us be creative in finding new ministries for Young People.

How to "Search" on the internet":

Using the Google Chrome web browser: If you want to "Search" our SCCs Facebook Page left click on the three horizontal dots on the right hand side of the Home Page (Front Page); then click on the magnifying glass and "Search;" enter your word or phrase in the rectangular box; and click "enter" to get results.

Following decades of evangelization, the Catholic Church in Africa "has taken root and is now an adult", the leadership of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) has said. In a message marking 55 years since SECAM was established, Cardinal Fridolin Ambongo, the President of SECAM, highlights the various ways in which the Catholic Church in Africa has grown, ranging from growth in vocations to championing for human development on the continent. "The Catholic Church in Africa is vibrantly building herself up as the Family of God and enriching herself with the experience of Small Christian Communities that are the hallmark of the Church of Jesus Christ in Africa," Ambongo further says.

DRC lay woman theologian Léocadie Lushombo is prominent among the African theologians in the ongoing Synodal Process. She stresses the importance of theological training for lay people especially women. Her Book Review of *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III* in the March, 2018 issue of the important American theological journal *Theological Studies* has this very challenging statement:

If the model or paradigm of the future is that of Small Christian Communities, as the book argues, then there is a need for the SCCs to undertake consistent theological formation/training because the laity do not have opportunity to access theological formation/training in many African countries.

We should be encouraged that the documents from the ongoing Synod in Rome stress theological formation and training of lay people. We are trying in Eastern Africa. More and more women are studying at Hekima, Tangaza and CUEA.

We are hopeful that lay people including women will be allowed to preach at Sunday Masses – after the proper formation and training.

Kenyan Bishops call for a moment of deep listening and discernment

Amid the present unrest and political and economic crisis in Kenya in East Africa, it is striking that the Kenyan Catholic Bishops' statement to the Kenyan Government is close to the steps of the Synodal Process. They state: "As a way forward, we, the Catholic Bishops, encourage the Kenyan President and his Government to truly listen and take action even before any form or forum for National Dialogue. He should find time for quiet and reflection. He should discern the choices he has to make and be guided by what is in the best interest of this great country Kenya."

The title of the article in the Vatican News is "Kenyan Bishops call for a moment of deep listening and discernment."

The Minnesota priest Mike Schmitz gave a rousing talk at the Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis this week. He asked: After Jesus Christ rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples what was the first thing on his "To Do" list. The answer: "*Bible* Study." On that first Easter Sunday as he walked with Cleophas and his companion on the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus, Jesus interpreted all the Scripture texts about himself. Our takeaway: Read the *Gospel* of next Sunday's mass before you come to church.

There is an expression: "As others see us." In a Catholic parish in Baltimore Archdiocese, USA I was explaining to one of the parish leaders the importance of choosing a *mantra* (a word or verse from the *Gospel* of the following Sunday) to meditate on during the week. She answered: "*Mantra*. Oh, yeah, that is something that they do in Yoga Class."

During the National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, Indiana, USA in July 2024 to illustrate synodality in action, the audience (congregation) participated in "conversations in the Spirit" small groups where they reflected on 1) how the Mass formed them as Catholics and 2) how the Mass prepared them to share the *Gospel* in the world.

We SCC members would do well to answer these two questions ourselves.

No. 89 of *How To Be a Missionary Synodal Church -- the Instrumentum Laboris* (Working Document) for the Second Session of the Synod states:

The contributions submitted by the Episcopal Conferences speak of Parishes, Base Christian Communities and Small Christian Communities as contexts of communion and participation in mission...The parish is understood as a community of [small] communities in the service of missionary creativity.

The Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church in Eastern Africa tries to participate in this missionary creativity from below, from the grassroots. A communion of families makes up a SCC. A communion of SCCs makes up an outstation. A communion of

outstations makes up a sub-parish. A communion of sub-parishes makes up a parish. Leadership is from below. Members of the Parish Pastoral Council come from the leaders of the SCCs.

From a person in England: "I would also add that SCCs are a way for those on their own to come together especially in the West. Sometimes being appended to a family does not really work. I recall a Christmas Midnight Mass at Aylesford Priory years ago. It was an occasion when families made an effort to come to Mass together but a couple of us 'singletons' realised that all over the chapel there would be folk on their own. So, we reserved a bench and invited them to join us. We, in effect, made a family and from joyful comments afterwards it was much appreciated."

Yes, this has been my experience too – especially those “singletons”/individuals joining online SCCs.

Some examples of missionary creativity:

1. Group weddings, often organized by SCC members, cut down on the expenses of individual weddings.
2. Parish collections are carried out through the SCCs.
3. Welcome and hospitality to new parishioners are carried out through the SCCs.
4. The SCCs help their members in the steps of the Order of the Christian Initiation for Adults -- OCIA (formerly called the RCIA).
5. SCC members visit the lukewarm Catholics and the fallen away Catholics in their geographical area.
6. SCC members try to be missionary disciples following the "Synodal Way of Life" of walking together and reaching out to others.

In a webinar on “Mission” we discerned the changes in structures, names and language in the Catholic Church especially in the light of the ongoing Synodal Process. In the 1980s to early 2000s official Catholic Church documents preferred to use the word “services” for the roles of lay people in the church. Ministries were reserved more for priests and deacons by virtue of their ordination. In the present Synodal Catholic Church ministry is much wider and applied to all Catholics by virtue of their baptism. So we have a flourishing of new lay ecclesial ministries in recent years spurring on by Pope Francis’ pastoral vision of church: acolyte, lector, Eucharistic Minister, catechist, etc. This popular usage today includes the legitimacy and importance of non-ordained lay ecclesial ministries officially recognized by the Catholic Church. In some cases there is an official installation or induction.

Two new ministries for lay people that are being studied in the Synodal Process are:

Ministry of Preaching including lay homilists -- both men and women -- preaching at the Sunday Mass. This includes a period of training.

Ministry of Accompaniment. Two examples: Lay people are chosen to accompany adult catechumens in the steps of the Order of the Christian Initiation for Adults -- OCIA (formerly called the RCIA) and to accompany newly married couples in the first five years of their marriage.

From an American lay woman: "Great to see and hear this point being made, which is so important and also more consistent with ministries (and ordination as it was understood) in the first thousand years of the church."

We want to explore the existing and new ministries for Young People.

Annual Celebration of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) Day 2024 (28 and 29 July 2024): "You Africans are Missionaries to Yourselves"-- Message from SECAM President:

The Church in Africa, renewed by the synodal journey and cemented in the spirit of communion lived in the Small Christian Communities, is called, in listening to one another and to the Holy Spirit, to embrace the evangelizing mission until it reaches all kinds of peripheries, with new ardor, new methods and renewed structures.

In our PACTPAN African Palaver Webinar Sister Josée Ngalula from DRC emphasized the importance of the Ministry of Accompaniment and Cardinal Wilfrid Napier from South Africa emphasized the importance of marriage in promoting families. At the end of the two hour session the Moderator Sheila Pires invited us to a minute of silence to reflect on what we shared during the palaver. Excellent conclusion.

We continue to promote the values of silence especially:

1. After the reading of the *Gospel* in our weekly SCC gatherings.
2. At key points during the steps of the Synodal Process.

Last week I did a Maryknoll Mission Appeal at a Catholic Church in Maryland, USA. We had a minute of silence three different times during mass:

1. After the reading of the "Gospel."
2. After the homily.
3. After communion.

At the beginning of mass it is important to say: "Today we will use three periods of silence to get into a deeper meaning of this gospel." A few people commented positively. I am not sure what the vast majority of parishioners felt. It was the Deacon at the 10:30 am mass in Maryland who recommended the one minute of silence after the homily to understand it more deeply. He reminded me that Pope Francis recommends this in one of his books.

From Bob Short: "I've often wondered how the general population would feel about taking a minute of silence? It looks like you got at least a little positive feedback."

From Mary Wahome: "Silence the best way of self reflection and the best way of listening to God's voice." "Mary, you are blessed to believe this. I wish more young people would have this conviction."

From a Permanent Deacon in a parish in Baltimore Archdiocese in Maryland, USA: "I'm happy to see that others also miss 'moments of silence' during Mass. In my opinion, the greatest need for silence is during and immediately after Communion--definitely no singing,

although I will begrudge background organ/piano music. We need to meditate on the incredible gift that we have just received. We need to remember the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual torture that Christ experienced to provide this gift to us. This is what we should be doing during the silence of Communion!"

Continuing reflection on the importance of silence:

"The words of the psalmist ring in my mind: 'Be still and know that I am God.' The faithful have to be re-educated, and this will likely take as many decades as it took for us to collectively lose our sense of reverence for the Mass and for the Eucharist. Doing away with the Communion hymn adds no time, but I'm certain some will complain about the silence. But, after receiving Communion, this is our time to talk to God -- to thank Him, to marvel at His goodness, to admit to ourselves that we are totally undeserving of such an incredible gift. Just because it takes effort to talk to God doesn't mean that we should avoid the opportunity."

Maryknoll missionary priest Father Gregory McPhee, MM, serves in Los Molinos, a village on the outskirts of Cochabamba, Bolivia in South America. He envisions Base Ecclesial Communities, also known as Small Christian Communities, to gather people regularly for prayer and Scripture reflection.

Maryknoll missionary seminarians Lawrence Mutiso and Leonard Kabaka serve in a rugged tract of over 4,700 square miles of the Amazon rainforest in Cochabamba Archdiocese in Bolivia in South America. Roughly 70 Base Ecclesial Communities, also known as Small Christian Communities, are spread throughout the territory.

Paper -- "LAURENTI MAGESA EPITOMES THAT DEEP HUNGER BEGETS AND INSPIRES LEGACY" -- to be delivered by Professor Mary Getui during the Second Laurenti Magesa's Memorial Lecture to be held at the Capuchin's Spiritual Centre, Msimbazi in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania on Thursday, 22 August, 2024. Magesa was a great supporter of SCCs and wrote extensively about them. There are 105 references to Magesa in our free, online Ebook on SCCs.

There is a synodal way of reading and reflecting on the *Bible*. Archbishop Hubertus van Megan, the Apostolic Nuncio in Kenya, said: "Devote yourself to the public meaning of the scripture; to preaching and teaching." The Dutch-born Vatican diplomat emphasized the need to pay attention to the Holy Spirit in teaching scriptures. He said, "It's not so much about what I think is good. It's not so much about my convictions, but it is much more about what the Holy Scripture is teaching us, what the Holy Spirit is telling us through the Word of God. You have to read, believe what you read, teach what you believe, and practice what you teach. It's first and foremost about knowing the Holy Scripture by heart."

As we reflect on the Eucharistic Famine/Eucharistic Hunger around the world:

The Glenmary Missionaries who serve in "missionary territories" ("priestless areas") of the USA had a large booth at the Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis, Indiana in July, 2024. The booth had a Geographical Map showing the counties in the USA that do not have mass on Sunday. Interesting.

The authentic Olympic and Paralympic spirit is an antidote against the tragedy of war and a way to put an end to violence. May sport build bridges, break down barriers, and foster peaceful relations. [#OlympicTruce](#) [#Paris2024](#)

Pope Francis

Prayers.

May our SCC members and Catholics around the world imitate the pastoral plan of the Catholic Paterson Diocese in New Jersey in USA where the Director of Evangelization says: "The overall process of the renewal and deepening of the Catholic faith and life in Paterson Diocese is actively moving forward into the 2025 Jubilee Year with the energy and enthusiasm of the Eucharistic Revival and the Synodal Process. Much is happening on the local, grassroots parish levels."

In describing the European SCCs experience Max Stetter says it well: "toiling on 'less fertile grounds' in Germany." This could describe the North American experience as well.

It can be said that Africa provides "more fertile grounds" for the formation and growth of SCCs. This is largely due to the community/communitarian nature of African society. We say that SCCs are not a project or program in the parish but a way of life. Family, community, unity, sharing, togetherness, participation and reverential dialog are some English expressions. *Ubuntu*, *baraza*, *ujamaa*, and *palaver* are some African language expressions.

In Pope Francis' experience the traditional Step Two in the Pastoral Theological Reflection Process called "Judge" is better explained as "Discern."

"Lost in Encyclical Translation: *Christus Vivit* and the Dramatic Differences Between the Spanish Text and the English Translation." *Our Sunday Visitor* (OSV) Innovative Talk by Brenda Noriega, 24 September, 2020, YouTube Website, 19:50 minutes, retrieved on 17 October, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0GfHK7U0Ew>

When we speak our native language, our vocabulary insists on nuances unique to our own experiences. It is no wonder why Pope Francis wrote his encyclical *Christus Vivit* in Spanish. His understanding of serving the young church came from his own experiences. To truly understand this, however, we must be diligent in examining interpretations of his words. This talk breaks down major cultural differences in the English and Spanish of *Christus Vivit* and opens channels of dialogue for future creative ministry strategies. In Pope Francis' experience the traditional Step Two in the Pastoral Theological Reflection Process called "Judge" is better explained as "Discern."



[YOUTUBE.COM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

The deep context of Christus Vivit - Lost in Encyclical Translation - OSV: Brenda Noriega

August 2024 African Proverb of the Month

A lover's place has no hills.

As related to the importance of marriage, this African Proverb reminds us of the Catholic Church in Africa's contribution to the Synodal Process going on in Rome, Italy. We begin on the grassroots by building strong marriages and families. A Small Christian Community (SCC) is a communion of families. An outstation is a communion of SCCs. A parish is the communion of outstations. A diocese is a communion of parishes.

Exchange with Alexandra Carroll, the Minister of Evangelization at Corpus Christi Parish in Paterson Diocese, New Jersey, USA:

Thank you, Alexandra, for your helpful email message.

I do better on one topic per email. You write: "We are planning an event on 1 October, 2024: Young Adults – Pizza with the Priest and Deacon (promotional graphics not prepared yet, to begin in late August/early September). I will speak more with Father Kevin about this, but we are hoping to invite other parishes in the deanery to attend this event as well."

"This is a great follow-up to the Synodal Process in Paterson Diocese. I am copying other interested people. I will use this example in my homily next weekend at Corpus Christi Parish and mention that the October, 2023 "Summary Report" of the First Session of the Sixteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops – *A Synodal Church in Mission* -- emphasizes the "Preferential Option for Young People."

In our Small Faith Sharing Workshops with college students we serve pizza and use the mantra: *Feed them and they will come.*

Here is the link to our Kenya SCC Facebook Page. Bishop Kevin Sweeney spoke in one of our Zoom gatherings.

Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community Facebook Page (Public Group)
[Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Communities | Facebook](#)

This Facebook Page was formed to help young people develop a personal relationship with one another, grow their relationship with the Lord, network young people through Small Christian Communities, support the marginalized in our local communities and help young people develop a sense of pride. It is connected to the twice monthly Zoom Gatherings. The Young Seekers come from Indonesia, Kenya, Pakistan, Tanzania, Uganda and the United States.

Peace, Joe Healey

From Father Cletus Mwiila, Parish Priest of St. Mary's Choma Parish in Zambia on the *Vatican News*:

In Zambia, we already have a strong history of Small Christian Communities (SCCs), so I share the message of making the SCCs become communities of change in the light of Synodality. The message promotes active participation in the Catholic Church, listening to one another and making sure no one is left behind, promoting a self-sustaining church lived in communion and the use of leadership as a service rather than the power of domination. My message also facilitates the discovery and use of charisms, vocations and ministries in the communities and among members.

Among the Synodal messages is the call to weave ties and build communities for change. Over the last 50 years, in Zambia and the AMECEA Region, the church has attempted to build and promote the image of the Church as Family. This was also given accent at the 1994 African Synod. But the reality on the ground sometimes remains challenging. There is a gap, or there are still some gaps, for example, between parents, youth and children. Some of these are cultural in that most African societies clearly define the roles of parents, adults and children. So, as we celebrate the Golden Jubilee of SCCs in the AMECEA region [1973-2023], the celebration should be enlightened by the Synod on Synodality.

Bishop Charles Kasonde, the Bishop of Solwezi Diocese in Zambia and the Chairman of AMECEA, adds: "Indeed I am happy and still happy for this press coverage. We are enjoying the Synodality breather as we go to its grand finale. We anticipate good outcome for the unity of purpose for our Catholic Church in Africa."

From Alloys Nyakundi: "This reminds me of the Ebook by Father Joe Healey, *Building the Church as a Family of God*. I believe that it's through SCCs that people are able to be synodal.

Archbishop Charles Palmer-Buckle of Cape Coast, Ghana is one of the voting delegates from Africa at the Second Session of the Synod to take place in Rome in October, 2024. He said that he hoped that "the delegates would present the best practices of the Catholic Church in Africa and not the complaints." We hope that the best practices of the SCCs in Africa will be presented.

Radio Ichengelo, "ZAMBIA: Ndola Archdiocese Closes Celebrations for Small Christian Communities," *AMECEA Online Newsletter*, Issue 555, 2 August, 2024, retrieved on the AMECEA Website, 2 August, 2024.

After a year-long celebration of the Golden Jubilee of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) Region, the Archdiocese of Ndola, Zambia has officially closed this period that was launched in Malawi in 2023. Archbishop Benjamin Phiri led the celebration of Mass for the closure at Pamodzi Parish in Ndola that coincided with the Diaconate Ordination where three seminarians were raised to the order of the diaconate. During Mass all the SCCs that won the Deanery Bible quiz were recognized and awarded for their outstanding performance. During the celebration of 50 years of existence of SCCs in the AMECEA Region, SCCs were encouraged to intensify Biblical Studies as a way of deepening faith. The SCC is a model that was created in December, 1973 as a pastoral priority in the region.

<https://communications.amecea.org/.../zambia-ndola...>



In our weekly gatherings of SCC members an essential feature is to read the *Gospel* of the following Sunday and apply it to our daily lives. This is different in Africa from other parts of the world.

Alloys Nyakundi asks: “How prepared are you for mass today?”

At the 11 am mass at Corpus Christi Parish in Chatham, New Jersey, USA on Sunday, 4 August, 2024 there were approximately 60 Young People. From their many blank stares I could tell that they were bored or not interested. They probably came to mass because they parents told them to.

From a SCC member: “A good question. If we are members of a Small Christian Community (SCC) that meets weekly, and in the middle of the week, and reads the Gospel of the following Sunday and applies to our daily lives, then we can walk into Mass on Sunday prepared. Also it is advisable to arrive at mass five or ten minute early and prepare ourselves spiritually.”

Under the topic: "The priest or deacon preparing his Sunday homily with others in the parish."

Excerpts from Peter Denio, "Leading Effective Meetings," Chapter 9 in *A Seminarian's Toolbox: Preparing for Parish Leadership* edited by Patrick Stokely (Liturgical Press, 2024). **The bold are my additions.**

Page 81: "When you are a pastor, you will come to know that meetings run the gamut from sit-downs with pre-Cana couples to staff meetings to sessions with individuals for pastoral care or counseling, and from parish plenary sessions to diocesan committee meetings to Small Christian Communities or prayer groups—sometimes all in one day!

Page 86: For maximum effectiveness, the forty-five-to-ninety-minute weekly or bimonthly staff meeting should include the following elements:

Faith sharing. An essential aspect of any parish meeting, particularly those that involve key parish leadership, is faith sharing. This is different from the read prayer or rote prayer done in unison. It's a time where group members reflect together on their lives informed by faith. A version of the *lectio divina* prayer style is perfect for this meditation, or for other forms of faith sharing that purposely connect our lives to our faith." **NOTE: The ideal is a weekly meeting that uses the Gospel of the following Sunday.**

Page 87: The reflection in this faith sharing section of the weekly meeting is valuable to all preachers in the parish whose responsibility it is to tend to what is happening in the parish and the wider society. Endnote 3 states: "The preacher also needs to keep his ear to the people and discover what the people need to hear. A preacher has to contemplate the Word, but he also has to contemplate his people (Pope Francis, *The Joy of the Gospel (Evangelii Gaudium)*, November 24, 2013, 154). **NOTE: This reflection can help the priests and deacons in the preparation of their homilies.**

Participating in a SCC that reflects on the Gospel of the following Sunday and applies it to our daily lives is a wonderful way for a priest or deacon to prepare his Sunday Homily.

From Leo Shea: "Excellent suggestions for Parish Eucharistic Celebrations."

From Paul Bork: "These are helpful, practical additions to the chapters.

Hello Young Seekers,

It is extra work but I ask you to go to our online Ebook:

Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa

https://smallchristiancommunities.org/.../04/Build_new.pdf

Under "APPENDIX: 28 Online E-Resource Materials on the On-going Formation and Training of Small Christian Community (SCC) Leaders and Members"

you will find: "Lay Ecclesial Ministries in Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa" Here are listed 26 ministries (yes, 26!!!).

No. 26 is: “Overall SCC Animator/Coordinator. In a few places the person still called Chairperson. Newer name is Moderator.”

Help us add New Ecclesial Ministries for Young People in the Catholic Church. Thanks.

On the Eucharistic Famine/Eucharistic Hunger in South Africa, Bishop Sithembele Sipuka, the president of the Southern African Catholic Bishops Conference (SACBC), addressed himself to the Synod on Synodality. He called for an ongoing discussion with regard to the shortage of vocations to the priesthood and religious life. The situation, he said, has led many Catholics, especially in rural areas, to be deprived “of the major source of Catholic identity, the Eucharist.” Thus "Shortage of Vocations" should be a topic or theme of a "Conversation in the Spirit" Synodal Session.

African Continental Presentation on the Synod: Saturday, 14 September, 2024

6 pm to 8 pm: East Africa

11 am to 1 pm: East Coast of USA

As part of a series of online international presentations being **sponsored by** Catholic global reform leaders (four international reform networks: International Church Reform Network (ICRN), Spirit Unbounded, We Are Church International (WACI), our organization Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI) and **hosted by** CCRI. Africa will have a panel discussion with representatives from two African church organizations. All are welcome to learn what is happening in this part of the world. Q&A followed by breakout room discussions. All are welcome.

African Synodality Initiative with Andrew Kaufa and Leocadie Lushombo.

Young Adult Seekers with Mary Wahome and Alloys Nyakundi.

Zoom sign on is link <https://zoom.us/j/2429500175>

Password: spirit.

ZOOM.US

Join our Cloud HD Video Meeting

Let us spread the word on this important Synodal Event.

From Alloys Nyakundi: “Yesterday 9 August four Young Seekers joined St. Kizito SCC members in welcoming the Maryknoll missionaries who are doing an Immersion Trip to Kenya. We got to visit a children's home, trees planted by St. Kizito with the help of Maryknoll Society, meet and greet children in the streets and later on visited a home of one of St. Kizito members where we had some coffee. During the sharing at coffee time Matt Dulka mentioned that the Maryknoll team on safari has become a SCC and it's now a sister SCCs to St. Kizito. I hope you'll enjoy the pictures.”

From Cecile Nick: “Shalom brothers and sisters, yesterday Faith Makori and I had an opportunity to meet the Maryknoll members who are currently in Nairobi. We also met few members of St. Kizito Small Christian Community in Waruku who took us around their area and learned a lot from them. The most amazing part is they've continued to grow a project which was started by Father Joe Healey when he was in Kenya. Personally I learned a lot from them and I take this opportunity to appreciate all our sponsors for their massive support. Thank you Alloys, the day was worth it.”

Great that you folks from KU were able to connect with the members of St. Kizito SCC in Waruku and the members of the Maryknoll Immersion trip from the USA. Great when our SCCs connect and interact. Good insight by Matt that the Maryknoll Immersion Trip members form a SCC when they are on a pastoral safari. Similar to pilgrimage groups.

SCC members are invited to respond to the Vatican's request.

"How To Be a Missionary Synodal Church," "Instrumentum Laboris" (Working Document) for the Second Session (October 2024), XVI ORDINARY GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE SYNOD OF BISHOPS, Rome, Italy, Synod Website, 9 July, 2024 <https://www.synod.va/.../il/ENG-INSTRUMENTUM-LABORIS-A4.pdf>

states in No. 29. "Men and women who exercise the ministry of coordinating a Small Church Community." We are asked to give feedback on the language and meaning of this new minister: "Coordinator of a Small Church Community." Here are some of the many names (alphabetically) of the Leader (a generic term) of a SCC that the document calls "Coordinator:"

Accompanier
 Animator
 Chairperson
 Facilitator
 Moderator
 Responsible
 Servant of the Servants
 Supervisor

NOTE: Our free, online ebook states: "Many parishes in Kenya now use the name or term "Moderator" for the leader of the SCC. In Nairobi Archdiocese it was decided that the Parish Priest should be the Chairperson of all the SCCs in the parish. Only he should use this name. He should be above, or in charge of, all the individual leaders of the neighborhood SCCs who are called Moderators. He is called "Baba Paroko" that means Father Parish Priest/Father Pastor. Unfortunately both in titles and structures the clerical, patriarchal, hierarchical, exclusive Catholic Church is dying very slowly in Africa."

What name do we prefer? And why? No one size fits all.

NOTE: Using the Synodal Process we discerned/evaluated all these words with the majority favoring "animator" as being energizing/activating without smacking of horizontal authority.

Concerning the name "Small Church Community" the study from the University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA cites 5,000 names worldwide. The name we choose fits our specific local context. Again no one size fits all.

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www.synod.va

Online searches on academia.edu this week are for this article followed by its Search Term:

"Promoting Small Christian Communities in Africa through the Internet" -- Christian colonialism in Africa.

"Promoting Small Christian Communities in Africa through the Internet" -- Small Christian Communities.

"Historical Development of the Small Christian Communities/Basic Ecclesial Communities in Africa" -- Small Christian Communities.

"Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Promote Family Ministry in Eastern Africa" -- Small Christian Communities.

"Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa" -- Missiological approaches of the Redeemed Christian Church of God.

This is part of Digital Evangelization in the Catholic Church that is being promoted by the Synodal Process.

This week the Kenya Catholic Community in America (KCCA) is celebrating its 13th Annual Convention at the St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church in Old Bridge, New Jersey, USA. Yesterday I gave a talk on "Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Around the World Led by the Holy Spirit." We also had a powerful Healing Mass. I wore the green chasuble that the St. Agatha Joy Women's Sewing Group in St. Kizito SCC in Waruku, St. Austin's Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese in Kenya made for me.

It is nice to hear from the grassroots. Here is a message from Agnes Alitsi, the Secretary of the St. Agatha Joy Women's Sewing Group in St. Kizito SCC in Waruku, St. Austin's Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya: "Thanks Mwanajumuiya Padre Joe. That's great for all you're doing and to hear that you wore the colorful chasuble made by the women of St. Agatha Joy Women's Group. it is a milestone. May you continue to have that strength."

In his remarks Archbishop Martin Kivuva described how the Catholic Church in Kenya has grown and multiplied from the grassroots through families and SCCs evolving into new parishes in his experience in Machakos Diocese and Mombasa Archdiocese.

Bishop Method Kilaini documents this interesting development in Dar es Salaam Archdiocese in Tanzania:

More than half of the parishes in Dar es Salaam were founded by Small Christian Communities. Normally in new residential places a few strong Catholics would start a Small Christian Community and pray together in their houses. As they increased one faithful person donated an area to build a common prayer shed. The SCC divided as the faithful increased but the shed became common to all. As the Christians multiplied the faithful bought more land around the original plot or found a big plot in the neighborhood and asked permission to build a prayer house and kindergarten. The next step is that it becomes an out-station and later a parish. Through SCCs they develop a solidarity that builds parishes.

Announcement:

Kenya Catholic Community in America (KCCA) 13th Annual Convention
St. Thomas the Apostle Catholic Church
Old Bridge, New Jersey, USA

the Small Christian Communities in the northern part of South Africa where some small rural villages get a visit of a male celibate Catholic priest only once a year.

We have to be open and transparent about our church history. Years ago I visited Fritz Lobinger in South Africa. He showed me an official letter in German from the Vatican signed by the then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Prefect of the Doctrine of the Faith, informing him that he is not allowed to discuss married priesthood.

May the Holy Spirit guide us today.

4. Seven Case Studies of SCCs in Eastern Africa

1. 36 Year (1986-2024) Journey of St. Jude Thaddeus Small Christian Community (SCC) in Tanzania and the World⁵³³

NOTE: A unique type of ongoing evaluation and assessment is to track one specific SCC over many years and learn from its variety of experiences. This Case Study describes very well the “ecclesial life” and activities of a Tanzanian SCC and how it evolves from one generation to the next.

St. Augustine Parish presently is one of the five parishes in Musoma Town Area of Musoma Diocese, Tanzania and has undergoing many changes over the years. Its geographical area was part of Musoma Cathedral that was founded in 1952 and then later was part of Nyamiongo Parish that was founded in 1986 and originally had 10 SCCs. St. Augustine Parish also called Mwisenge Parish was founded in 2000.

St. Jude Thaddeus Small Christian Community (SCC) in the Mwisenge Juu section of the St. Augustine Parish started in 1986. Of the 100 adult lay Christians who were registered in the community there were about 40 active members. About 15 adults (together with youth and children) met every Thursday afternoon for the *Bible Service/Bible Reflection* and a pastoral meeting (that rotated in the members’ homes or courtyards). Visiting sick neighbors and those in the town hospital and Catholics who do not come to church regularly usually took place on Friday afternoon.

As the Catholic population grew in the parish so did the number of people in the SCCs in Mwisenge Juu section. In 2014 St. Jude Thaddeus SCC “gave birth” to two new SCCs. The core group remained part of the SCC Mama, but other SCCs members joined the new communities. A new generation of leaders took responsibility.

It is worthwhile to relive the early history of this SCC and its development over the years. St. Jude Thaddeus SCC is typical of many SCCs in East Africa. It is a parish-based Small Christian Community with a pastoral focus. Stated another way, most of the SCCs in Eastern Africa are a "Pastoral Model" that develops within the parish structure (quite different from the Latin American model, for example).

Here is a description taken from 1996:

⁵³³ Originally published as one of the “Examples of African Narrative Theology and Practical Evangelization” in Chapter Three on “Church as the Extended Family of God” in the book *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (1996). Updated version as of August, 2002 was presented at a Workshop on International SCC Twinning, National SCC Convocation, San Antonio, Texas, USA on 1 August, 2002. Updated version as of July, 2014 was posted on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website on 16 July, 2014.

Three-quarters of the members are women. In fact the only committed men are William Marko, the chairperson of the community for five years (who has since moved to another parish), Wilson Chacha who has been chairperson and vice-chairperson over the years, Fabian Bunini who is the present vice-chairperson and a faithful member Shindika. Women take all the other leadership roles -- Prayer Leader, Marriage Counselor, Guardian of the Children and Good Neighbor Minister. A pillar of the SCC from the beginning has been Semphroza Chacha who has taken many leadership roles. The current secretary is Anna Wanzagi and the current treasurer is Bernadetta Matuma. When William Marko went to Mwanza for a one-year catechists' course, Beata Raphaeli filled in very well as the Acting Chairperson. Most Catholics in the neighborhood say they are too busy to participate in the weekly *Bible Service*. Very few youth come to the SCC activities. Many children attend as part of African extended family life.

The SCC has occasional seminars on topics such as HIV/AIDS, the 1994 First African Synod and lay leadership training. It coordinates a small lending library especially to encourage reading of religious books. Mutual aid and social outreach are very important such as visiting the sick, visiting the bereaved, and taking a collection (money, food, supplies) for poor and needy people.

Occasionally SCC members visit a neighboring SCC. While visiting a woman whose uncle had just died in another SCC (whose Patron Saint was also St. Jude Thaddeus) Semphroza Chacha said: "When there is a death in your family there is a death in our family. When there is a death in your SCC there is a death in our SCC." The wider implication is that when there is suffering or pain or loss in your family there is suffering or pain or loss in our family. When there is suffering or pain or loss in your SCC there is suffering or pain or loss in our SCC. In other words, when you are hurting I am hurting.

The Eucharist is celebrated almost monthly in the SCC including: a weekday in Advent and Lent; October 28, the feast of St. Jude Thaddeus; the annual Mass of Anointing; and special events such as the mass of a newly ordained priest and a farewell to a regular member of the SCC. There are special celebrations in the community after members receive the sacraments such as Baptism, First Communion, and Confirmation. The SCC sponsors, encourages, and accompanies its Adult Catechumens before their Baptism on Holy Saturday night.

Special events have included the marriage celebration of the former chairperson William Marko, celebrations after the ordination to the diaconate and priesthood of Father John Chacha and jubilee and anniversary celebrations. These parties include plenty of food, singing, dancing, and merry-making. Celebrations are an important part of the *life* of the SCC. Visitors are welcomed to the SCC meetings with singing and clapping.

The last ten years have witnessed a real growth in the community. After a great deal of discussion St. Jude Thaddeus was chosen as the Patron of the SCC to emphasize its apostolic spirit and the desire to help the neediest (the lost causes). At first only a few members shared their reflections on the Gospel of the following Sunday. Then members divided into three small groups⁵³⁴ during the Faith-sharing and everyone began speaking and

⁵³⁴ Based on the LUMKO, South Africa Method of small buzz groups in SCCs that are a feature of group dynamics.

sharing. Now SCC members reflect easily on different scripture passages. Even Blandina Mgita (now deceased), a 75-year-old woman who could not read and write, occasionally led a small group.

Sometimes the children form their own Small Reflection Group so they could participate more freely in their own way.⁵³⁵ A *Bible* reflection on “The Parable of the Lost Sheep” began with ten children (aged five to 14) closing their eyes, picturing a favorite animal, and then mentioning it to the small group -- a giraffe, sheep, cow, gazelle, lion. Then two young boys (who actually herd their family sheep) described what it is like. This led the group into a discussion on “Jesus as the Good Shepherd” in *John* 10.

An example of the *Bible* reflection in the SCC is the insights on “The Parable of the Shrewd Manager” (*Luke* 16:1-13). SCC members pointed out the different meanings of “money” -- actual cash, material goods, the lures of the devil, worldly pleasures, various compulsions and excesses, etc. Each person is challenged to make a choice when two paths or two options are present, for example:

- a. Schoolchild: studies or play.
- b. Married man: one or two wives.
- c. SCC member: to attend the weekly *Bible Service* or take care of personal interests like going to a bar.
- d. Young person: Different religious vocations.

It was pointed out that people need to take a stand and not be blown about like a flag in the wind. A person mentioned the popular animal Story-Proverb of “The Hyena and the Two Roads.”⁵³⁶

A very hungry hyena went out on the Tanzanian plains to hunt for food. He came to a branch in the bush road where the two paths veered off in different directions. He saw two goats caught in the thickets at the far end of the two different paths. With his mouth watering in anticipation, he decided that his left leg would follow the left path and his right leg the right path. As the two paths continued to veer in different directions he tried to follow them both at once. Finally he split in two. As the well-known African proverb says: *Two roads overcame the hyena.*

The last sentence of this story is the proverb *Two roads overcame the hyena* (Luyia, Kenya and Swahili, Eastern Africa). This proverb teaches that you cannot do two things at once. Another SCC member mentioned the parallel scripture passage in *Matthew* 6:24: “No one can serve two masters...You cannot serve God and money/wealth/mammon.”

⁵³⁵ A visiting priest (a former scripture professor) participated in the Small Reflection Groups during two different weeks. He was amazed how the children were so comfortable and vocal in talking about the gospel in their small group. Later he said: “I would not have believed this is possible if I had not seen it with my own eyes.”

⁵³⁶ There are many versions and titles of this popular animal story. See *The Undecided Hyena* in Rose Mwangi, *Kikuyu Folktales: Their Nature and Value* (Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau, 1970), pp. 66-67 and *Chagua Moja* (Swahili for “Choose One”) in M.P. Nyagwaswa, *Mifano Hai -- Kitabu cha Kwanza* (Mwanza: Inland Publishers, 1979), p. 18.

A practical action is usually chosen that links to the theme of the gospel. Most frequently this is visiting the sick people in the neighborhood and the laying on of hands for healing. Other examples are visiting bereaved people; taking up a collection for a needy person; personal and community spiritual preparation for an important feast or liturgical season; visiting Catholics in the neighborhood who have been lax in their faith life; and preparing a local celebration.

A lot of decision-making and activities of the parish pass through the SCCs. During their pastoral meetings members evaluate the requests for Marriage and Baptism of infants. This becomes a challenging and learning experience regarding the importance of Christian marriage. Many Catholics cannot receive communion because they have not married in the church. There are an increasing number of unmarried mothers. Many parish activities and financial campaigns/collections are carried out through the SCCs. Recently St. Jude Thaddeus SCC raised money for new vestments in the parish church.

Over the years SCCs like St. Jude Thaddeus have come to believe and experience that they are the church on the local level, that they are an authentic basic community of Christian life and formation. These SCCs are participating more in pastoral decision-making on the local level.

But the lay people are still too dependent on the priests in what continues largely as a clerical and hierarchical church in Eastern Africa. One priest in Musoma, Tanzania complains that SCCs don't stand on their own, but survive because of regular blood transfusions, that is, animation and help from the outside. A growing edge is how the SCCs can be more "transformational" in the larger society especially in justice and peace issues.

One member of St. Jude Thaddeus SCC has AIDS. She now lives at the nearby Charity Home run by a Tanzanian priest. She is very thin and cannot walk. The whole St. Jude Thaddeus SCC takes responsibility for her. When she was too sick to live at home, the SCC arranged for her to move to the Charity Home. On every First Friday of the month the SCC members visit her bringing food, clothing, soap, and money for her living expenses during the next month. One member said: "Our gift is small, but our love is large." SCC members also visit at other times to pray with her and encourage her to persevere. There is a saying used in the outreach of the SCC: *Sharing truly divides the sorrow.*

How can a local African SCC share with the World Church? In 1992 St. Jude Thaddeus SCC participated in a worldwide project to prepare questions from local small Faith-sharing church communities on the Sunday readings of the three-year lectionary cycle.⁵³⁷ Six SCC members (three men and three women) wrote three questions for Passion Sunday (Year C), the Easter Vigil (Years A, B, and C) and the 11th and 12th Sundays of Ordinary Time (Year B). Some questions are: "What crosses do you carry in your everyday lives -- sickness, AIDS, marriage conflicts, backbiting and jealousy in personal relationships, civil and tribal wars, etc.?" "Women play an important role at the foot of the cross and at the

⁵³⁷ See *Faith-sharing for Small Church Communities: Questions and Commentaries on the Sunday Readings* edited by Art Baranowski and the National Alliance for Parishes Restructuring into Communities (Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1993). Over 7,500 members of Small Church Communities throughout the world including Kenya, South Africa, South Sudan, and Zimbabwe prepared these questions.

empty tomb. What women played an important role in your faith life? How?" "In your personal life or your small church community what small thing [like a mustard seed] has become a big or important thing?" "What images of Jesus come from your own culture and grassroots experience?"

St. Jude Thaddeus SCC started twinning with the Circle of Friends SCC in St. Joseph's Parish in Golden, Colorado, USA in the fall of 1996.⁵³⁸ The seed was sown at the Tenth Anniversary Convocation of Buena Vista in Estes Park, Colorado in January, 1996. The meeting's *Bible* Groups sent signed Bibles (the *Serendipity New Testament*) to SCCs throughout the world including Tanzania. One of the Buena Vista participants, Bernie Moore from Golden, Colorado, invited Father Joe Healey, a Maryknoll missionary priest in Tanzania, to visit her SCC in Golden (that started in 1994 and now is called Circle of Friends SCC) in November, 1996. They set up the SCC Twinning or SCC Partnership. It also called "SCC Partners" or "SCC Sisters"/Sister SCCs" or "Sister Communities". In Swahili it is called "*Jumuiya Pacha*" or "*Jumuiya Dada*."

The members of St. Jude Thaddeus SCC and Circle of Friends SCC began exchanging letters and photographs. This led to the Golden SCC sending gifts of Colorado souvenirs, shirts, rosaries and scapulars to its Musoma twin. In turn the St. Jude Thaddeus SCC members sent African cloths and woven baskets to their Golden twin. The USA twin helped the women's group in its Tanzania twin to start a self-reliance project. Praying for one another is an important part of this twinning relationship. Members of the two SCCs also share stories of the pastoral activities in their SCCs and parishes.

Individual families in each SCC adopted each other and exchanged letters (paper letters and email messages) and photographs. This "Family Twinning" within the SCC is another creative "New Way of Living World Church at the Grassroots Level." In a recent letter to its USA Twin, the Tanzanians wrote: "We your SCC Twin greet you in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even though you dear friends live far from us we want to express our deep sympathy on the events of 9 September, 2001." They also sent a colorful African cloth called a "*Khanga*" with a Swahili saying translated as: *Put God first in everything*. These various examples show that the main purpose of SCC twinning is sharing the mutual spiritual and pastoral experiences of SCCs and networking in building a World Church. International SCC twinning is a practical expression of the global experience of Small Church Communities, "Global Solidarity" in action.

For many years my main pastoral work has been animating Small Christian Communities (SCCs) that is the key pastoral priority of the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa. I joined as a full member of St. Jude Thaddeus SCC in 1988 and have journeyed with the community ever since. Even though a priest I try to be just a regular participant, not a leader. Whenever I am "home" in Musoma I participate in the Thursday *Bible Service* and meeting of my SCC. The leaders of St. Jude Thaddeus SCC are like family to me especially Semphroza and Wilson Chacha. One of their grandchildren, Virginia (now 22 years old), is named after my deceased mother. This is part of the meaningful African custom to keep alive the name and memory of a deceased person as one of the living dead.

⁵³⁸ See the description of this SCC Twinning in: Gaughan, Margaret. "Connected by Faith." *Maryknoll*, February, 1998: 22-24. Reprinted in *SCC Gatherings*, 11, 2 (Summer, 1998): 1-2.

One month our SCC started planning a big celebration. Special invitations were sent out to priests, sisters and lay leaders of the other SCCs. The day before the feast I mentioned to Semphroza that I hadn't received an invitation. She answered with a big smile: "You can't get an invitation. You're a member of our SCC. We don't send invitations to ourselves." Suddenly I realized that I really belonged. I was truly part of this SCC -- a communion of extended families in the same neighborhood. The SCC members had evangelized me.

In 1994 I moved to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, but I continued to communicate with my SCC. Some SCC members visited me in Dar es Salaam. St. Jude Thaddeus SCC members remain faithful to the weekly *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* and social outreach to the needy.

Often the SCC members reflect on the missionary spirit of their Patron St. Jude Thaddeus, one of the 12 disciples and the various missionary passages in the *Bible*. Jesus sends His disciples "to the ends of the earth" (*Acts of the Apostles* 1:8) to proclaim the Good News of Salvation. "The Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs⁵³⁹ to every town and place where he himself intended to go" (*Luke* 10:1). Their work was very fruitful. "The seventy returned with joy, saying, 'Lord, in your name even the demons submit to us!'" (*Luke* 10:17). Members of St. Jude Thaddeus SCC reflected on this mission passage in *Luke* as follows:

The seventy people were a mixture of men and women, old and young. The SCC members emphasized that Jesus sent out the disciples in pairs. This was the community reaching out in mission. The disciples helped each other along the way. Today SCC members follow in the footsteps of the first disciples and imitate especially the apostolic spirit of St. Jude Thaddeus. The SCC is a community that is both gathered and sent. Several African proverbs on community were mentioned. Two Christians, James and Maria Goretti, said that modern disciples does not go out alone, but with the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴⁰

The SCC tries to live out this pastoral and missionary spirit in concrete ways. SCC members visit Christians in the neighborhood who no longer receive the sacraments or have complicated marriage situations. On the celebration of the community's feast day (St. Jude Thaddeus on October 28), each member invites one or two Christians who are wavering or "new" people in the neighborhood to the Eucharist and meal. This is also a way of implementing the gospel on the "Good Shepherd."

But getting involved in deeper justice and peace issues was difficult. Becoming agents of change and transformation was a big challenge. On one occasion some St. Jude Thaddeus SCC members visited a sick member in the Musoma Hospital. They were told that the only way to get extra medicine was pay a bribe. During their weekly meeting the members discussed what to do. They decided that they couldn't change the situation. They would just little, ordinary people. They said the Parish Priest, the Catholic Bishop and influential

⁵³⁹ Other translations use "two by two." The meaning is the apostles journey as partners, as collaborators, as a team, helping each other.

⁵⁴⁰ See Healey and Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, pp. 344-345.

government leaders were the best people to intervene. The SCC members prayed the rosary and hoped for the best.⁵⁴¹

In December, 2001 I visited Musoma for the first time in seven years. It was the occasion of the Final Vows of Sister Juliana Karomba, MSOLA. I visited St. Jude Thaddeus SCC at the home of Wilson and Semphroza Chacha, long-time members and leaders of the SCC. A family spirit and family values continued at the heart of the SCC. The SCC continued to be the preferred “place” to pass on the Catholic faith to the children and grandchildren.

In July, 2014 I visited Musoma for the first time in 13 years. It was the occasion of the launch of two books by and about the Tanzanian theologian Father Laurenti Magesa who writes a lot about SCCs. I visited St. Jude Thaddeus SCC at the home of Wilson Chacha, a long-time member and leader of the SCC. The SCC continues to meet on Thursday afternoons and is very involved in parish activities. Wilson explained how the SCC continues to adapt to changing situations in the parish and in the Tanzanian reality. This includes a new generation of leaders.⁵⁴²

A small community of us representing three generations of the family visited the grave of his wife Semphroza Chacha whose fourth anniversary of death is 16 July. We had a memorial prayer service and blessing. Besides having been a very active SCC member, Semphroza is one of the two women in Musoma Diocese who has two priest sons: Father Godfrey Biseko and Father John Chacha. Her memory and example lives on.

In a Facebook Message dated 8 November, 2019 Mwanajumuiya Msanii Charles Ndege reports:

St. Jude Thaddeus Small Christian Community (SCC) in the Mwisenge Juu section of the St. Augustine Parish, Musoma Diocese, Tanzania that started in 1986 is still going strong after almost 34 years. SCC Members meet every Saturday. A crucial test is passing on the local leadership to a new generation. Presently a woman is the Chairperson/Animator and a young man the secretary.

2. Case Study of a SCC Member in Lusaka, Zambia

We usually think of case studies as a written report or a research project. But a DVD can be a case study such as *Small Christian Communities: The Heart of the Church*, a 25-minute DVD produced by Catholic Media Services Television Production Studios, the

⁵⁴¹ The full story is told as “What Would You and Your Small Christian Community Do?” in Joseph Healey, *African Stories for Preachers and Teachers*, Paulines Publications Africa, 2006 and as “What Would Your Small Christian Community Do?” African Story No. 553 in the “African Stories Database,” African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 14 July, 2014, [http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/resources/storiesdatabase.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=506](http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/resources/storiesdatabase.html?task=display2&cid[0]=506)

⁵⁴² Wilson Chacha, conversation with the author in Musoma, Tanzania on 10 July, 2014.

communications ministry of the Zambia Conference of Catholic Bishops (ZCCB) in Lusaka, Zambia. In the spirit of SCCs being a new way of being church, the DVD begins with the grassroots story of a Zambian laywomen Mrs. Clementina Banda, a widow with 11 children and 14 grandchildren. She is a member of St. Gabriel SCC in St. Francis de Sales Parish in Lusaka Archdiocese.

She explains how she sells vegetables for a living at the market. Clementina is conscientious and hard working. She is a responsible mother and sends all her children to school. The foundation of her life is her Catholic faith. Clementina is very conscious of God in her life. She describes how she passes on her faith to her children. She says that all her children are strong in their faith. One is an altar boy, another a member of the choir, another has just sacramentalized his marriage in church.

Regularly she is seen with *Bible* in hand going to her SCC meeting. She says: “At church we listen to the Word of God, but here in the SCC we meet and discuss every detail for everyone to understand.” The SCCs members read the *Bible*, then discuss in groups of five each. Then everyone participates in the sharing.

Small Christian Communities are, in fact, an extension of good neighborliness intended to share Scripture, pray together, care for the sick and show concern on issues of justice and peace. Banda describes their life and ministry in these words: “Small Christian Communities are interesting. We strengthen each other in our faith. Every strong Christian has to start from a Small Christian Community. If there is an illness we support each other.”

The DVD also portrays the life and activities of St. Lawrence SCC in the parish and the pastoral, spiritual and theological reflections of Zambian Cardinal Medardo Mazombwe (died in 2013), the former Archbishop of Lusaka, and Zambian diocesan priest Father Edwin Mwale, the pastor of St. Francis de Sales Parish. Truly SCCs are the heart of the church and the foundation of the parish in Eastern Africa.

3. Case Study of a Recent Experience of SCCs in Nairobi, Kenya

In addition to presenting this academic-style evaluation, I would like to share a recent personal experience to convey the life and spirit of SCCs. On 17 February, 2011 I participated in a meeting of the Huruma Zone (*Jumuiya Pamoja* in Swahili) of 10 SCCs in Holy Trinity Parish in Kariobangi North in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya.⁵⁴³ The joint meeting was in Swahili and took one and one half hours. The meeting was well prepared ahead of time with a table, special cloth, candle, crucifix, *Bible* and hymn books.

There are a total of 74 SCCs⁵⁴⁴ in the whole parish. Every Thursday these particular 10 SCCs meet separately in their homes. On the third Thursday of the month they meet together at St. Mary Mother of Mercy Center for a zonal meeting. Between 60 and 70 people (a majority of women with a good number of men and youth) reflected on the Gospel of the following Sunday and discussed their responsibilities in a SCCs Model of Church. I felt the liveliness, energy and sense of participation of this community. The coordinator (responsible) is a dynamic middle aged Catholic woman named Hellen Wanjiru. She directly represents the zone on the 40-member Parish Pastoral Council (PPC). NOTE: All the representatives of the parish associations/organizations on the council belong to SCCs. During the meeting different SCC members took on leadership roles. The facilitator of the *Bible* Sharing was a young woman who called on different members to read. 12 people (six women and six men) shared the *Bible* verses that struck them. Then there were reflections on the gospel passage and Prayer of the Faithful (General Intercessions).

The pastoral meeting section included reports from the coordinators of different ministries in the SCCs like the family apostolate, apostolate to the sick, liturgy and justice and peace. The SCC members discussed an action plan. The coordinator was skilled in answering questions and calling upon others. There was a good spirit of fraternal correction and pointing out better ways of doing things. I felt the leaders saying that “we lay people, we SCC members, are the Church. The growth of the Church here in Kariobangi North is our responsibility.” I heard the Swahili word for “we are responsible” – *tunawajibika* -- used frequently.

I thought of the guideline that in the SCC Model of Church in the AMECEA countries the pastoral activities of the parish pass through the SCCs. There was a sense of ownership by these local Christians and a willingness to face the inevitable challenges of a busy parish in Nairobi. Overall I felt these people understood and practiced that SCCs are a way of life, not just a project or a program in the parish.⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴³ See Holy Trinity Catholic Parish, Kariobangi North, Nairobi, Kenya (<http://www.holytrinitykariobangi.org>)

⁵⁴⁴ Each SCC has a large moveable photograph of Servant of God Cardinal Michael Maurice Otunga on the wall of its meeting place and promotes his cause of beatification.

⁵⁴⁵ I like to spontaneously visit Catholic Churches on Sunday mornings and listen to the announcements at the end of the Sunday masses, read the notices posted on the Church Notice Board and read the weekly bulletin. Often they give a clear picture of the life, activities and priorities in the parish. I have heard up to ten references to SCCs on a single Sunday – announcements ranging from the time and place of meetings of specific SCCs in the parish to the names of the SCCs responsible (*zamu* in Swahili) for the readings, taking the

I had the opportunity to participate in this meeting of the Huruma Zone because I accompanied Father Harrison Yaa of Mombasa Archdiocese who did his SCC Practicum (in-service or on-site training) in Holy Trinity Parish as part of writing his M.A. Thesis in Pastoral Ministry on SCCs in the Pastoral Theology Department at Tangaza University College.⁵⁴⁶ He focused on the challenges of promoting SCCs as a model of church in an urban context. He drew on Italian missionary Father Daniel Moschetti, MCCJ's insight that SCCs are "a fitting Ecclesiology for the cities" in Africa:

This leads to a measure of decentralization to neighborhood household groups. This model of being a church-community befits the human situation of the city and slum-dwellers because it creates a network of solidary and mutual trust.⁵⁴⁷

SCC members themselves describe how their small communities offer security and support in the midst of the unrest, crime and violence of Nairobi city life.

Yaa tells the story that as part of his weekly participation in the activities of the SCCs one Saturday he helped the members of a particular SCC to clean the church before the Sunday Eucharist. Afterwards several people remarked that a priest should not sweep and clean the church. But Yaa explains that as a priest he wanted to fully participate in the responsibilities of the SCC – just like everyone else.⁵⁴⁸ This is a good example of the changing role of the priest in this new model of church.

Three years later in 2014 *Seed Magazine* provided an update and evaluation of the SCCs in Kariobangi Parish.⁵⁴⁹ Some key quotations:

The power of the Small Christian Communities lies in the ministries that each member is expected to take part in. There are those who minister to the sick, some to the needy and others on issues of peace and justice. Those who belong to the different ministries are known as *wanahuduma* and they work within the community where they live...

The other ministry is the *Huduma ya Familia na Imani*, Family and Faith Ministry, and here is where the catechists belong. They are those who

and bringing up the offertory for the follow Sunday's masses to plans for training workshops/seminars of SCC leaders and animators. These examples show that SCCs are integral to the pastoral and social life of the parish.

⁵⁴⁶ Harrison Yaa, *Building, Strengthening and Sustaining Small Christian Communities*.

⁵⁴⁷ Daniel Moschetti, *Urban Ministry in Africa: Need for New Models*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, *Spearhead* Nos. 145-147, 1997, p. 64.

⁵⁴⁸ On a bishop and other prominent Catholics being ordinary members of a SCC, Kilaini adds: "One day I went to clean the church when it was our turn, and besides me were two judges of the high court and the wife of a government minister. I love it." In *Ishengoma, Akamwani*, p. 7.

⁵⁴⁹ Lourine Oluoch, "Why Jumuias Form the Backbone of Kariobangi Parish," *Seed*, Vol. 26, No. 12, Issue 272 (December, 2014), pp. 12-13.

teach the catechumens and the families to prepare for infant baptisms. “Four times a year we have infant baptism with an average of 15 to 20 infants. In a year we can have 80 to 100 infant baptisms. The parishioners who belong to this *huduma ya familia* look into the preparation during two months for the parents of the infants and the *wasimamizi*. They are also tasked with preparing the couples for marriage. Twice a year we have two and a half months formation for couples who want to get married, and they have to go through this formation. Currently we have eight couples who are preparing to be married together and eight others who are preparing for other occasions. Twice a year we have the *ndoa pamoja* where they can get married together on the same day.”

As Fr. [Felipe] Resende explains, one of the biggest fears people have of getting married is the *gharama* but as a church they don't focus on that. “We don't look at that in the church, for us it's not important if you have a good dress, you go to eat well or you have a good car. What is important is that you prepare, you know what is a Christian family and then you get to be a Christian family under the grace of the sacraments,” he says...

“We know the good of being in *jumuiyas* and it is an experience that the people like. Through the *jumuiya* we learn the Word and live it, we build unity without tribal boundaries. This parish is made up of people from many tribes in Kenya but through the *jumuiya* we have to meet as one tribe, the tribe of God,” Alice Wekesa, the social worker in the parish, concludes.

4. Case Study of Six Active YSCCs in Dandora Parish, Nairobi

Another active youth haven is Dandora Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese. It has a total 59 SCCs⁵⁵⁰ including six active Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs). These are neighborhood groups of young people between 14-29 years-old who are organized according to the five geographical phases (divided by the streets). When the number of youth in one phase became too many they divided into two Youth SCCs. These Youth SCCs are connected to the regular (mainly adult) SCCs in their phases and meet with them occasionally. Youth who have experienced SCCs in their high school boarding schools have an excellent background for these parish-based Youth SCCs. They have many activities similar to the Kangemi Youth SCC above. The young men and women of these different Youth SCCs communicate the feeling that “we young people are the church too.” They reach out to various Youth Groups in other parishes to encourage them to start specific YSCCs.

St. Gonzaga Gonza Youth SCC over the years has been coordinated by Mercy Wandera, James Omondi, Evelyn Nyaituga, Anthony Odoyo, Jenny Kyalo, Gibson Thiongo, Johnte Ndiawo and others. Their photograph is posted in the Photo Gallery of our SCCs Website. <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/photo-gallery.html>. The members have weekly *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* every Sunday afternoon as well as many other activities – social, apostolic and spiritual. They have a “Public (Open) Group” on Facebook that presently has 127 members as of 23 April, 2016: <https://www.Facebook.com/search/results.php?q=Gonza+%C3%89+Gonzaga+Gonzaga&init=public#!/groups/gonzagagonzascc> Their posts on this Facebook Page are like a Case Study of a Youth SCC and describe the members’ lives, priorities and activities very well. A lot of posts are on relationships and friendships.

A creative example is the question: “What's your favorite verse in the *Bible*? And why? It might be a verse that defines you or your life.⁵⁵¹ Kindly just share it out.” Some answers:

- *Psalms* 139:1-18, 23-24.
- *Luke* 24:26. “Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?” Another translation starts with “ought not...:”
- *Psalms* 41:10: “Be still and know that I am God”.
- *1 Peter* 2:9: “But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood and a holy nation..... God has brought you from darkness to his precious light.”
- *Luke* 4:43: “Jesus said to them, ‘I must proclaim/preach the good news of the Kingdom of God to the other towns also, because for this purpose I was sent/have been sent.’” Also *Mark* 1:38: “Jesus said to them, ‘Let us go on to the next towns that I may preach there also; for this purpose have I come.’”⁵⁵²

⁵⁵⁰ For more background on these SCCs, see Cyprian Binaka, “Towards a Pastoral Theology of Fundraising: Case Study of Fundraising for Funerals in Holy Cross Parish, Dandora.” Long Essay. Nairobi: Tangaza Tangaza University College Library, 2006.

⁵⁵¹ Another approach is to mention one’s favorite verse(s) at different stages in one’s life.

⁵⁵² When Ukweli Video in Nairobi, Kenya produced a DVD in 2004 on the author’s missionary ministry in Eastern Africa called *Walking with the Eastern African Church in Mission*, I used this Gospel text to trace a chronological line of my missionary journeys or

- *John 3:16*: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life".⁵⁵³

Another example is to ask on any given Sunday: "What have you learned in today's gospel?" Based on Sunday, 21 September, 2015's Gospel story of the "Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard" (*Matthew 20:1-16*)" some answers are:

- That I should seek the Lord while He can be found.
- That he will reward us with his salvation n make us be under his lordship. That's the automatic one denarius he will give to everyone who comes into his field.
- That He is always with us in our times of trouble and whenever we call unto him.
- This mantra: "Faith and salvation are generous free gifts from God."
- We should hope the first shall be the last. We should not covet anything before God. We are all equal.
- God is always merciful.

A new development is that young adults (25 years old to 35 for young women and 26 years old to 35 for young men) are in the midst of forming their own SCC called the Young Adults Small Christian Community (YASCC) – the seventh SCC for young people in Dandora Parish. This age group felt out of place in the Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) and wanted their own identity. The 40 or so members are half still in school, half working. About 10% are college graduates. When fully formed and approved this will be the 60th SCC in the parish. They are part of the Young Adult Masses in Outer Ring Deanery in Nairobi Archdiocese.

Representatives of St. Stephen Youth SCC and the Dandora Youth SCCs have presented their experiences in our SCC Classes in Nairobi and posted material on our SCCs Website and Facebook Page.

travels to other towns and places in Kenya and Tanzania: Starting in Nairobi, Kenya and traveling to Rulenge to Iramba to Makoko to Dar es Salaam in Tanzania. During the Buzz Groups *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* on this passage in our SCCs Class at Tangaza University College on 5 February, 2015 I connected this passage to our daily lives and mentioned the internet towns that are not geographical but situational. I used this passage in my homily at my 50th Anniversary of Maryknoll Missionary Priesthood (Golden Jubilee) Mass at the Maryknoll Society House in Nairobi on 14 January, 2016. I shared that the new "town or place" for me is not a physical or geographical place, but a virtual or existential or situational place --the internet, social media and social networking. So mission for me means going to the "towns" of Facebook, Instagram, Skype, YouTube and WhatsApp. I mentioned that I meet and interact with Kenyan young people not outside the church after the Sunday Mass, but in the social media on the internet.

⁵⁵³ This is part of the Gospel for the Feast of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross on 14 September. In an online internet poll it was voted the most popular Bible verse. In USA it was made famous by the American football quarterback Tim Tebow who wore eye black with this inscription. He caused millions of football fans to Google the meaning of *John 3:16*.

5. Case Study⁵⁵⁴ of St. Kizito SCC in St. Austin Parish in Nairobi, Kenya move to another section

In Nairobi Archdiocese Kenyan diocesan priest Father Cletus Ngugi started SCCs in Ngarariga Parish in Limuru Deanery in 1976. In St. Austin's Parish in Nairobi Deanery Irish Spiritan missionary priest Father Martin Keane, CSSP started SCCs in 2000. Originally one SCC -- St. Austin's SCC -- covered the whole Waruku geographical area. Then more Catholics came into the area and SCCs became a pastoral priority. St. Kizito Small Christian Community (SCC) started in 2003 when it was one of the four new SCCs that branched off from St. Austin SCC in the Waruku area – along with St Charles Lwanga SCC, St. Petro Mwamba SCC and St. Josephine Bakhita SCC. This was the Local Church in the neighborhood. We chose [St. Kizito](#) as our Patron Saint because he is an African martyr who was young and active. He was baptized shortly before his death. We want to follow in his footsteps – innocent and courageous. Our SCC is linked to families and concerned about family life. We believe that the Catholic Church is part of the Family of God in Africa. We learn about the culture and traditions of our different ethnic groups in Kenya. We are sensitive to people's rights. We encourage unity among Christians.

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

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

1. Analyze and discuss the drawing (cartoon) on page 16-17.
2. Read the story in Step One ("See"): "Mr. and Mrs. Kivu and Their Two Children" on page 18-19.
3. Read the Situational Analysis in Step Two ("Judge") on pages 19-22.
4. Read the Gospel (*Matthew 17:1-9*) and the scripture commentary.
5. Answer question 3 in Step Three ("Act"): "Amidst the challenges facing the family, how is your Small Christian Community helping its members to cope with these challenges?"⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵⁴ This Case Study was originally placed in the context of Chapter 13 on "SCCs Promote Family and Marriage Ministry in Eastern Africa" to highlight that a SCC is a communion of families.

⁵⁵⁵ Kenyan lay woman Lucy Nderitu reflected on this question in her St. Matia Mulumba SCC of Don Bosco Parish, Makuyu, Nairobi Archdiocese on 1 March, 2014. In commenting

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

Marriage and family life are important to each and all of us. We all come from families. We all have a mother, father, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, nephews, and nieces. Everyone desires a good, warm and loving family where people care for one another. If we don't have these relatives, we feel deprived. A warm and loving family is God's plan for each of us. From the very beginning, when God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, God had a plan for marriage and family life.⁵⁵⁶

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

- The family is the first school. As a “communion of families” our St. Kizito SCC is a school too that has a mission to educate.
- Remove the backbiting,⁵⁵⁷ jealousy and critical feelings among SCC members and their families.
- Prayer is very practical. We should pray more for our family problems and our family needs.
- As part of our Lenten action, visit the *Amani na Wema* ("Peace and Goodness") Children's Home (AIDS orphans) located in the geographical area of St. Kizito SCC in St. Austin's Parish.

In St. Kizito SCC a Kenyan married laywoman, Jackline Oduor, is responsible for marriage ministry and a Kenyan married layman, is the assistant. Unfortunately, they have not received special training for their leadership roles. Helping young people in the small

on how Pope Francis wants to examine the pastoral challenges experienced by family at the October, 2014 Synod, she emphasized that the laws touching on family and marriage passed in the Kenyan Parliament do not take into account African values and Christian values. We have to challenge the wrong application of these laws that may harm our families. We have to train our children in the right direction because they will have the families of the future.

⁵⁵⁶ Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *How Can We Be One?* p. 20.

⁵⁵⁷ Some years ago SCC members in Tanzania composed an “African Way of the Cross Following Our Local African Situation Especially the Sufferings, Crosses, and Problems of Our Everyday Life.” Women especially, based on their life experiences, composed the 13th Station: “Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross.” Theme: “Backbiting, Calumny, Contempt, False Rumors, Gossip, and Insults.” This is described in the story “Living an African Way of the Cross” in Joseph Healey, *What Language Does God Speak: African Stories about Christmas and Easter*, Nairobi: St. Paul Publications Africa, 1989, pp. 65-69, Healey and Sybertz, *Towards An African Narrative Theology*, pp. 243-246 and in “African Lenten and Easter Stories” on the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 18 August 2014, <http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-by-season/12-easter-stories/53-african-way-of-the-cross-following-our-local-african-situation-especially-the-sufferings-crosses-and-problems-of-our-everyday-life.html>

community to sacramentalize their marriages (regularize their marriages/have marriages blessed in church) is relatively easy. The two main challenges are advising on mixed marriages (such as a Catholic and a Protestant, a Catholic and a Muslim) and counseling couples with marital problems.

Two SCC members, Tobias Musando and Winfred Nthenya were married at St Austin's Church. The enjoyable reception was catered in the parish hall afterwards. There was plenty of good food and lively singing and dancing. The next day, Sunday, 15 June, 2015 the weekly *Bible Service* of the small community based on the Gospel of the following Sunday took place in the newly wed couple's home in Waruku. There was a special blessing of the couple, their home and all the SCC members.

Two SCC members, Paul Mboya and Elizabeth Alouch, exchanged their marriage vows at St. Austin's Parish on Saturday, 14 June, 2014. Their invitation card has this powerful prayer: "May the love we share today mean more tomorrow. May it give dreams and wishes to pursue. So dear Lord, from this day lock our hearts together and keep the key for life."

St. Kizito SCC helped one of its faithful members, Kimori Conard, to prepare for his marriage with Jackline Kwamboka in Nairobi on 6 December, 2014. It was a long collaborative process. Conard's SCC in his original home parish in Kisii Diocese was also involved. Kwamboka's SCC in her original home parish in Kisii Diocese and her St. Elizabeth SCC in St. Francis of Assisi Gatina Outstation in Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Nairobi were also involved. In addition to St. Kizito SCC itself helping in the marriage preparations and making a financial contribution, some SCC members were part of a group called "Friends of Conrad Kimori." They met weekly to raise funds for the wedding. Then many SCCs members actively participated in the wedding at St. Francis of Assisi Gatina Church and celebrated together at the reception. Significantly it was a rare fresh marriage, that is, the couple did not live together before they had a sacramental marriage.

As a happily married couple Kimori and Jackline now live in Waruku and are very involved in their SCC. They are very active in encouraging other young people to get married in the Catholic Church. They each gave a Marriage Testimony during the Formation Meeting of the St. John Paul II Evangelizing Teams in Nairobi, Kenya on 15 March, 2015. They described the steps in their marriage preparation and their present married life together. Jackline said, "we ask experienced marriage couples to journey with us"⁵⁵⁸ -- in the spirit of accompaniment. In a later conversation on the many problems connected with the dowry in Kenyan society, Jackline said "my parents were not after the dowry; they wanted to help my growing faith."⁵⁵⁹

Next the St. Kizito SCC members helped Agnes Alitsi and Ben Wanjala to finish the steps of their marriage preparation over a period of several years. Their sacramental marriage finally took place during the 8 a.m. Mass on Easter Sunday at St. Austin's Parish on 27 March, 2016 followed by a lively reception in the parish hall. They choose a married couple

⁵⁵⁸ Jackline Kwamboka, Formation Meeting of the St. John Paul II Evangelizing Teams. Nairobi, Kenya, 15 March, 2015.

⁵⁵⁹ Jackline Kwamboka in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 17 March, 2015.

in Waruku – Herbert and Jacinta Nabangi as the Best Man and Matron of Honor. Hopefully they will actively accompany the new couple in their marriage.

As Ben said: “Some of our best friends in our SCC such as Annastasia, Sammy and Paul have accompanied us.” Some SCC members were part of a group called “Friends of Ben Wanjala.” They met twice a week to raise funds for the wedding -- contributing a little bit each week following the maxim *Little and little, fills the measure* (the Swahili is *Haba na haba, hujaza kibaba*). These raised a total of 62,000/= Kenyan Shillings (\$62). The meetings were also social occasions to build community.

A marriage during the 8 a.m. mass on Easter Sunday may seem strange to Westerners. For security reasons the Kenya government does not allow marriages to be performed after 6 p.m. So the marriages that we have had for many years during the Holy Saturday Night Vigil Service have been transferred to the following day – either as part of one of the Easter Sunday Masses or immediately after the last mass.

In the West we are used to the meaningful custom of only the father of the bride escorting his daughter down the center aisle and “giving her away” (“handing her over”) to the bridegroom (her future husband) in front of the altar. This is always a powerful, moving and sometimes emotional ceremony.

In Africa marriage has been inculturated in different ways. A central value is that the marriage is between two families, not between two individuals. Customs differ depending whether the ethnic group(s) are patriarchal or matriarchal. If the former, in the marriage ceremony the parents of the bride and groom escort their two children down the aisle at the beginning of mass. In front of the altar they turn towards each other, greet warmly and then the parents of the bride “hand her over” to the family of the groom. There are short speeches with everyone praying and hoping that the bride is happy in her new home.

At Ben and Agnes’ wedding reception, there were numerous speeches by the parents, and even the grandparents, of the bride and groom. They emphasized the union and solidarity between the two families of the Wanjala and Alitsi. Again everyone hoped that the wife will be happy in her husband’s family home. In turn, the husband is always welcome to visit his wife’s family home. The singing and clapping accentuated the joy, hospitality and liveliness of the happy extended family celebration.



When I was asked to speak at the wedding reception I joked that we are starting a new campaign in St. Kizito SCC and the other SCCs in Waruku: We are chanting: "Who is next? "Who is next?" Meaning: Who will be the next couple to get married in church? *Karibu*. Welcome.

Some of the SCC members serve in the new Ministry of Marriage Accompaniment. Some experienced married couples are Marriage Pastoral Accompaniers before and after the church marriage.

The active involvement of men is a big factor in St. Kizito SCC. On Sunday, 17 August, 2014 SCC members met for the first time in the new House of Charity Children Home. 33 participated (13 laymen, 12 laywomen, four religious sisters, two children, one priest and one seminarian). SCC members visited and prayed for the 17 abandoned babies (all under three years old) in the home. Helping abandoned babies is one of the challenges in responding to the harsh reality of family life and marriage in Kenya today. SCC members reflected on the Gospel of the following Sunday (21st Sunday in Ordinary Time). A number of men gave reflections on the themes of faith, inculturation and authority and offered some examples in the Prayer of the Faithful.

There are many men in St. Kizito SCC. Some are leaders who are active in promoting family and marriage values. Why the difference from other SCCs in Nairobi that have very few male members?⁵⁶⁰ Three reasons stand out. First, men from lower income families seem to participate more in SCCs than men from wealthy families. Most SCC *Bible Services* take

⁵⁶⁰ Compare with St. Catherine of Siena SCC in Queen of Heaven Parish in Karen, Nairobi. At the weekly SCC *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* on Monday, 28 July, 2014 there were one man and 16 women. The reasons given: some of the SCC members are widows, their husband are not Catholics; their husbands are working; and their husbands are just not interested.

place on Sunday afternoons. The more wealthy men are out spending money. The poorer men in the informal settlements are at home with their children and free to participate in their SCCs. Second, St. Kizito has a healthy mix of many different Kenyan ethnic groups that are originally from all over Kenya. There is no dominant ethnic group that is common in other parts of Kenya. All ethnic groups are welcome and participate. Third, husbands have moved to Nairobi for work and live with some of their older children who are in school while their wives remain back in the villages with some of the younger children. For example, the chairperson (“minister of the ministers” or “servant of the servants”) is a Luyia who lives in Waruku while his wife lives in Kakamega in Western Kenya. The secretary is a Kamba who lives in Waruku while his wife lives in Kitui in Eastern Kenya.

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

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

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

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

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

Two ongoing challenges are:

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

Two SCC members, Athanus Mutua Muvua and Joyce Wakiki Masai exchanged their marriage vows in a Nuptial Mass at St. Austin’s Parish on Saturday, 22 August, 2015. This was a “fresh marriage,” a term used to describe a marriage where the couple had not been living together beforehand.

The Maryknoll Sisters Congregation (Religious Community of Catholic Missionaries) is sponsoring an International Bazaar of Crafts and Homemade Items on Saturday, 24 October, 2015 at the Maryknoll Sisters Center, Maryknoll, New York, USA. A benefactor

has bought and donated to the bazaar some African Batik Shirts, Dresses and Handbags made by the St. Agatha Joy Women's Tailoring and Training Group in St. Kizito Small Christian Community (SCC) in Nairobi, Kenya. Sales in, and donations to, other International Craft Fairs and Events in Eastern USA will take place during the rest of this year and next year.

St. Kizito SCC's maturity is found in the transition to new leadership in February, 2016. This is a process involving two categories of leaders: the normal five overall leaders and the nine new lay ecclesial ministers. Let us pray for the good participation and success of the "Workshop for New SCC Leaders" in St. Austin's Parish, Nairobi -- today, Sunday, 21 February after the second mass. Ben Wanjala reports: "Yesterday, we elected Leaders of St. Austin's Parish. During the retreat meeting issues were brought up on

1. Orientation of members.

2. Good Leadership. The facilitators were the Parish Priest Father George Wambua, his Assistant Father Mike and the catechist Pius. The election of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) will take place on 28 February, 2016 after which the parish priest will plan for the Commissioning."



Congratulations to Paul Makau and Mercy Maita on their Catholic sacramental marriage in St. Austin's Parish, Nairobi, Kenya on Sunday, 21 August, 2016. Now in our St. Kizito SCC we continue to ask: "Who is next?"

Welcoming visitors is an important part of the "life" of St. Kizito SCC. Ben Wanjala writes:"

It was a great day for me and St. Kizito SCC of Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya to host guests from different parts of the world on Sunday, 23 October, 2016 including Fr. Noel Mpati from DRC, Sister Josée Ngalula from DRC, Michael Meyer from Germany, Fr. Alfred Chaima from Malawi, Fr. Charles Odira from KCCB, Kenya, Fr. Justin Matepa from Zambia, Fr. Vincent Elimah from Kenya and Bishop Method Kilaini from Tanzania among many others. We are in solidarity with our fellow Small Christian Communities in Kenya and around the globe. We can be stronger and more united today and into the future thereby absorbing new members that the next generations can be proud of. We thank Michael Orondo for representing St. Austin's Parish at this SCCs Networking Meeting and organizing this trip to St. Kizito SCC and to St. Agatha Joy Women's Training and Tailoring Group, the women's group in St. Kizito SCC that has a sewing club that sold beautiful African shirts and bags to the visitors.

Nine members of a mission immersion trip (three deacons, two diocesan priests, two laymen, one lay woman and one Maryknoll priest) sponsored by the Maryknoll Society visited St. Kizito SCC in Waruku on Friday, 4 November, 2016. There was an atmosphere of warm hospitality, singing, joy and high spirits. Deacon Matt Dulka, one of the facilitators, wrote to the women members of the St. Agatha Joy Women's Training and Tailoring Group: "Dear sisters, please let me add my deep gratitude for your warm welcome and hospitality. Your hope and joy were contagious. When I get back I'll send you some pictures. Let's continue to hold each other in prayer. All the best with the sewing project." As a "first" Matt recorded the children singing "Happy Birthday" to his mother on his smartphone and sent the video via Facebook back to his mother in North Dakota, USA. The American visitors are going to help market the African bags and shirts in the USA.



Maryknoll seminarian John Siyumbu is wearing the African shirt made for him by the St. Agatha Joy Women's Training and Tailoring Group in Nairobi.

Two cousins of mine in New Jersey give an annual gift to their children's families and their business partners' families of a donation of \$100 each to a particular charity (total of \$1,000). In December, 2017 their message read: "Merry Christmas!. A donation has been made in your name to the self-help group in Nairobi, Kenya -- the St. Agatha Joy Women's Training and Tailoring Group." The card included this photograph:



Members of St. Kizito SCC in Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya pose for a photo with visitors from USA after a bible sharing session on 19 February, 2014.

In the last three years (2018 to 2021) the membership of St. Kizito has grown so that now up to 50 members have been participating in the weekly meetings. The SCC leadership has been discerning how to “divide” the SCC. In a positive metaphor how can the Mother SCC give birth to smaller Children SCCs or to a separate Branch SCC.

Mwanajumuiya Moderator Ben Wanjala reports:

Finally after a long way of 13 years, on Sunday, 14 March, 2021 our St. Kizito SCC, Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya managed to bear another SCC by the name St. Monica⁵⁶¹ SCC. This happened after we were overwhelmed by the high number of members. Therefore we were not able to meet inside a house during our *jumuiya* meetings. It also took two to three years to complete one round for all members. It has been a long way to really to accomplish this activity. It will go down in the history at our St. Austin's⁵⁶² Parish that St. Monica SCC, (being the mother of St. Austin, the patron saint of our parish) came out of St. Kizito SCC under the leadership of the Year 2021 Team. I take this opportunity to thank our Parish Priest Father George Wambua, our

⁵⁶¹ How many people know Monica is an African? She came from Tagaste, a Roman-Berber city in present-day Algeria now called Souk Ahras. The town was the birthplace of St. Augustine, the famous Christian theologian and Bishop of Ancient Hippo Regius (modern name is Annaba in Algeria). In Roman times Hippo Regius was an important and prosperous city in North Africa. It was situated near the mouth of the river Ubus.

⁵⁶² Austin is the Irish name for Augustine.

executive team and fellow members who stood up and assisted us to reach this level.

St. Monica SCC leaders are as follows:

- Moderator: Noel Meja
- Secretary: Dominic Musioka
- Assistant Secretary: Elizabeth Mboya
- Treasurer: Pamela Okoth
- Liturgical: Gabriel Mwatela
- Peace and Justice: Josephat Mulinya

St. Kizito SCC leaders are as follows:

- Moderator: Benard Wanjala
- Secretary: Conard Kimori
- Treasurer: Faith Khatambi
- Liturgical leader: Agnes Wanjala
- Good Neighbor: Michael Orondo.

These leadership teams will remain this way until the coming election time next year.

Our moderator Mwanajumuiya Ben ("Baba Joseph") has shown excellent leadership during this whole process. Many people have commented that bearing a new child/SCC in our SCCs Model of Church is very hard work on many levels. One friend Mwanajumuiya Belza Ramos congratulated St. Kizito and St. Monica and said: "It is not splitting or dividing, but branching out/expanding, having a baby/having a twin."

As a *Mwanajumuiya Damu Damu* member of St Kizito SCC for 13 years I have seen so much growth under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. When I first joined, the women would not speak and were so shy/reserved. Now look at all the women leaders/animators. I count five women in the list above.

The obstacles to forming a new SCC were as follows:

Social.

Financial.

Leadership.

We had a very good turnout at the Official Inauguration of the Association for Catholic Information in Africa (ACI Africa) Online News Service at JJ McCarthy Grounds in Nairobi, Kenya on 17 August, 2019. Francis Njuguna and I represented the AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team and there was a four member delegation from St. Kizito Small Christian Community. Hellen Mollah, the Children's Mentor, read the: "Good Will Message from the Members of St. Kizito Small Christian Community (SCC), Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya."

We had a nice visit with Bishop Joseph Obanyi who said that he belongs to St. Charles Lwanga SCC (on the compound of the Bishops' Residence in Kakamega). He said that at the Kakamega Diocesan Synod it was decided that all priests and sisters should belong to a specific SCC in their geographical location. The members of St. Kizito SCC invited Archbishop Bert van Megen, the Apostolic Nuncio in Kenya and South Sudan whose residence is in the geographical location of St. Kizito in St. Austin's Parish, to join our SCC.

A delegation from St. Kizito SCC (three laymen, two laywomen and one priest) paid a courtesy call on the Apostolic Nuncio, Archbishop Hubertus van Megen in Nairobi, Kenya on 30 August, 2019. He was very gracious and welcoming. He remembers, of course, his two Malawian friends, Andrew Kaufa and Emmanuel Chimombo. We invited him to join our SCC since the Apostolic Nunciature is on Manyani Road West, part of the physical location of St. Kizito SCC in St. Austin's Parish in Nairobi. He said he would be happy to participate in our events. We joked that we all are part of "our neighborhood" (that includes the Maryknoll Society House across the street).

We had a very interesting conversation and exchange. We talked a lot about the AMECEA pastoral priority of SCCs. The archbishop has served in five of the nine AMECEA countries: Eritrea, Kenya, Malawi, South Sudan and Sudan. Archbishop van Megen asked each SCC member, "How has the SCC personally changed your life," and there were some very striking answers. We gave him some gifts: a small painting of our patron saint St. Kizito, an African stole made by the St. Agatha Joy Sewing Club and two books on SCCs. A bonus for me was viewing the two large African murals on the walls of the large sitting room of the nunciature: "Creation" and "Redemption."

My answer to Archbishop van Megen's question, "How has the SCC personally changed your life?" For me, the experience of weekly lectionary-based Faith-sharing in the SCC has been very enriching and formative especially connecting the Gospel to our daily lives.

Moderator Ben Wanjala and Mwanajumuiya Padri Joe Healey represented St. Kizito SCC at the Mass to commemorate the 16th anniversary of the death of Servant of God Cardinal Maurice Michael Otunga at the Holy Family Basilica on Friday, 6 September, 2019. I told this story: "Servant of God Cardinal Maurice Michael Otunga liked to give the example of the SCC members in Nairobi Archdiocese that donated the bride's wedding dress to a couple in their small community who had insufficient money for all their needs for their Marriage Ceremony in the Catholic Church."

St. Kizito SCC began using the WhatsApp Platform on the social media in 2018 and it has expanded and transformed its communications and networking. Now there are daily posts to share information and plans as part of the daily life of the SCC. Some examples (alphabetically):

- Celebrations.
- Collections for deceased people.
- Daily mass readings and reflections.
- Devotional sayings.
- Highlights of *Jumuiya* Masses.
- Holiday greetings.
- Photographs of SCC events.

Practical action and service outreach projects.
 Responsibility for coordinating a Sunday mass at St. Austin's Parish.
 Rotating homes of SCC member for the daily evening prayers and rosary (in certain months).
 Stories.
 Weekly online gatherings.

How members of St. Kizito SCC are putting into practice one of five essential characteristics of the SCC Model of Church in Eastern Africa -- "Regular practical action and outreach" – can be seen in this exchange of SCC Facebook Messages:

1. Email message sent to the Catholic Bishop of Kakamega Diocese, Kenya:

Dear Bishop Joseph Obanyi,

Christmas greetings from St. Kizito Small Christian Community (SCC) in St. Austin's Parish, Nairobi. We enjoyed the photo story on you in the Tuesday, 24 December, 2019 issue of the "Daily Nation": especially the final sentence: "The bishop urged residents to give to the poor during Christmas."

We tried to put your advice into practice here in Waruku in St. Austin's Parish in Nairobi. On Christmas afternoon a delegation of leaders of St. Kizito SCC (three men and two women) visited three very poor families in the local neighborhood. We gave Christmas gift bags containing sugar, flour, cooking oil, soap and candy for the children. We tried to fulfill the Gospel of *Matthew* 25:42: "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat."

In one poor flat a Moslem widow named "Rehema" (Swahili for "mercy") welcomed us with her eight children and grandchildren. She led the opening prayer in Arabic. The family was very grateful for our gift that was also a symbol of interreligious dialog. A key is that we visited these three families "kijumuya" (Swahili for in community) -- a five member delegation (three men and two women). These days we are trying to put into practice the Sukuma, Tanzania Proverb: "That which is good is never finished."

Christmas peace.

2. Bishop Joseph Obanyi responded: "That's what I call truly a good story from the grassroots. A story of Christmas from Small Christian Communities is concrete and the Way of the Church. I am happy for St. Kizito. Keep it up. I keep learning."

3. We replied to the bishop: "Many thanks, Bishop Joseph. There are also great photos of our St. Kizito SCC members visit to Waruku on our SCCs Facebook Page. Go to: <https://www.facebook.com/joseph.../posts/1081886608821789...> "The photos are taken by Mwanajumuiya Josephat Mulinya, our official SCCs photographer. He is originally from Kakamega. You met him here in Nairobi.

4. We wrote the bishop: "The next time you visit the Apostolic Nunciature please stop by the Maryknoll House (across the street) to say hello. Karibu. We all keep learning in the SCCs Model of Church. There is a wonderful Ugandan proverb: *One hand washes the other.*"

As I walked around Waruku on Christmas afternoon with Ben Wanjala, the Moderator of St. Kizito SCC, and met members of other SCCs, I understood better that SCCs are a way of life and not just a program or project of St. Austin Parish. When I met the twin

boys of Ben and Agnes Wanjala called Joseph and Josemaria they made my day by saying that "we like church more than school."

There is a popular saying in Spanish -- *We create the path by walking* – that encourages the growth of SCCs in their local context from the grassroots up. In light of today's signs of the times a new path has developed in Kenya and in other countries: Weekly "Online Small Christian Communities."

The popular saying -- *When God closes a door, somewhere He opens a window* – provides a good metaphor. In Kenya in March, 2020 during the terrible coronavirus pandemic crisis a door closed, namely the Kenyan Government wisely ordered that our Catholic Churches be closed and that our Small Christian Communities (SCCs) physical meetings be suspended. But then a window opened, namely Online Small Christian Communities that are also called Virtual SCCs and Digital SCCs. SCC members in Kenya are using WhatsApp, Skype, Facebook, Google Hangouts, Google Meet, Zoom, Microsoft Team and other social media platforms. SCC members send text messages and audio and video clips to their weekly online meetings. The experience we are getting will give new ideas for our SCCs Courses that are offered every year at CUEA, Tangaza and Hekima and to other SCCs-related courses and online courses/projects.

Take our St. Kizito Online SCC gathering on Sunday, 5 April. We used the Gospel of the following Easter Sunday (*John 20:1-9*): The Gospel Sharing Animator ("Mwalimu wa Neno" in Swahili) or Prayer Leader downloaded the audio version and sent the text version of this gospel to our St. Kizito SCC WhatsApp Page the night before. At exactly 2 p.m. began the *Bible Service*. After the Opening Prayer we shared online through text messages in Swahili the verses that struck us the most. Then SCC members shared their reflections on the Gospel and how this passage applies to our daily lives here in Kenya. Many reflections referred to the coronavirus crisis in the world today. The reoccurring message was to depend on Jesus Christ. Then we had the Prayers of the Faithful and final prayers. We ended with a audio clip of a rousing song provided by Mwanajumuiya Nicholas Mulei.

Our Moderator Mwanajumuiya Ben Wanjala counted 21 members who participated in this weekly WhatsApp St. Kizito Online SCC gathering though text messages and two audio clips on our WhatsApp Page. We overcame problems of lack of electricity and lack of internet connectivity. Our Prayer Leader Mwanajumuiya Gabriel Mwatela did a great job.

Last night I participated in a Live Holy Thursday Prayer Service on Zoom. Following the "See," "Judge" and "Act" Reflection Process/Method, the facilitator began by asking: "What is your context? We members of the St. Kizito Small Christian Community (SCC) in St. Austin Parish, Nairobi can answer on two levels:

1. Universal context. The whole world is in the grip of the coronavirus pandemic.
2. Local Nairobi, Kenya context. We are in a situation of partial lockdown, quarantine, night curfew and restricted travel. Our Moderator Ben Wanjala and our Assistant weekly Bible Reflection Leader Agnes Wanjala are stuck in Kitale and restricted by travel. We have an active online WhatsApp community. Our SCC Treasury is way down.

ADD

To my friends in St. Kizito SCC in Waruku, Nairobi: This week I really missed our annual "Outdoor Way of the Cross" from Waruku to the front of St. Austin Church. I had planned to walk with Joseph and Josemaría, the twin boys of Ben and Agnes Wanjala. Because of the government regulations on no public social gatherings because of the coronavirus pandemic, everything changed. Seven African Maryknoll seminarians and I set up the 15 Stations within the Maryknoll Society compound on Manyani Road West. We used the Stations of the Cross of the Eastern Deanery AIDS Relief Program 2020. Yes, we observed social distancing! Perhaps a sentence from the 15th Station says it best: "All our crosses, all our pain, all our sins, are healed, forgiven and transformed. Christ is risen!"

During a Maryknoll-sponsored Zoom Webinar on the topic "Climate Justice in Kenya" on Thursday, 19 November, 2020 I presented a short Case Study of St. Kizito SCC in Nairobi, Kenya covering:

1. Planting trees in the neighborhood of Waruku.
2. Cleaning garbage dumps in the neighborhood.
3. Promoting the ban on certain kinds of plastics in Kenya.

Mwanajumuiya Agnes Alitsi writes: "In my SCC of St. Kizito, Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya we are encouraging each and every one to stay safe by wearing masks, washing hands, maintaining social distance and also to follow the rules and regulations given by the Catholic Church and Ministry of Health. Due to these challenges we are ensuring that we continue with our *jumuiya* towards our vision."

In the last three years (2018 to 2021) the membership of St. Kizito has grown so that now up to 50-60 members have been participating in the weekly meetings. The SCC leadership has been discerning how to "divide" the SCC. In a positive metaphor how can the Mother SCC give birth to smaller Children SCCs or to a separate Branch SCC.

Mwanajumuiya Moderator Ben Wanjala reports:

Finally after a long way of 13 years, on Sunday, 14 March, 2021 our St. Kizito SCC, Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya managed to bear another SCC by the name St. Monica^[9] SCC. This happened after we were overwhelmed by the high number of members. Therefore we were not able to meet inside a house during our *jumuiya* meetings. It also took two to three years to complete one round for all members. It has been a long way to really to accomplish this goal. It will go down in the history at our St. Austin's^[10] Parish that St. Monica SCC, (being the mother of St. Austin, the patron saint of our parish) came out of St. Kizito SCC under the leadership of our Year 2021 Team. I take this opportunity to thank our Parish Priest Father George Wambua, our executive team and fellow members who stood up and assisted us to reach this level.

^[9] How many people know that Monica is an African? She came from Tagaste, a Roman-Berber city in present-day Algeria now called Souk Ahras. The town was the birthplace of St. Augustine, the famous Christian theologian and Bishop of Ancient Hippo Regius (modern name is Annaba in Algeria). In Roman times Hippo Regius was an important and prosperous city in North Africa. It was situated near the mouth of the river Ubus.

^[10] Austin is the Irish name for Augustine.

St. Monica SCC leaders are as follows:

- Moderator: Noel Meja
- Secretary: Dominic Musioka
- Assistant Secretary: Elizabeth Mboya
- Treasurer: Pamela Okoth
- Liturgical: Gabriel Mwatela
- Peace and Justice: Josephat Mulinya

St. Kizito SCC leaders are as follows:

- Moderator: Benard Wanjala
- Secretary: Conard Kimori
- Treasurer: Faith Khatambi
- Liturgical leader: Agnes Wanjala
- Good Neighbor: Michael Orondo.

These leadership teams will remain this way until the coming election time next year.

Our moderator Mwanajumuiya Ben ("Baba Joseph") has shown excellent leadership during this whole process. Many people have commented that bearing a new child/SCC in our SCCs Model of Church is very hard work on many levels. One friend Mwanajumuiya Belza Ramos congratulated St. Kizito and St. Monica and said: "It is not splitting or dividing, but branching out/expanding, having a baby/having a twin."

As a *Mwanajumuiya Damu Damu* member of St Kizito SCC for 14 years (2007 – 2021) I have seen so much growth under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. When I first joined, the women would not speak and were so shy/reserved. Now look at all the women leaders/animators. I count five women in the list above.

To clarify further Mwanajumuiya Ben Wanjala wrote the following message on our SCCs Facebook Page:

Dear fellow SCC Members,

I am Mwanajumuiya Ben Wanjala, Moderator to St. Kizito SCC, Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya in Africa. It is under St. Austin's Parish, Muthangari in the Archdiocese of Nairobi run by the congregation of Holy Ghost Fathers (the Spiritans). I found this story very important to share with you, St. Kizito SCC started 18 years ago and I am the fourth chairperson since we started. This *jumuiya* has had the highest number of members in the whole parish of St. Austin's. It happened to me that sometimes when I attend the parish meetings they called me the moderator of the biggest *jumuiya*. This *jumuiya* was overwhelmed. It has 85 families when it comes to members and it ranges to over 100 members. However all members were not active. When it comes to a meeting you may find 60 members attend or participate. It has not been easy to reach to the conclusion of dividing the *jumuiya* into two. I used to have meetings with the parish priest Father George Wambua separately who helped me a lot. Sometimes I met with leaders and members until we all came to an

agreement in January, 2020. We had finished all the preparations. We were left with only one meeting of the Parish Priest with all the *jumuiya* leaders. But then pandemic came and disrupted everything. We had to revisit the whole process again this year in January, 2021 until 14 March, 2021 when our newest Jumuiya of St. Monica was founded.

I know that there are other SCCs out there like ours – too big. This is not something where you can just wake up one day and say “let's divide.” It can't happen that way. My advice to other SCC members is to be patient, intelligent and be focused always to see what is ahead before other members notice. Above all is prayers because prayers can move mountains.

Let us harvest the memories.





Let us harvest the memories. And remember this report from Maryknoll seminarian Victor Mutobera in Nairobi on 12 June, 2019:

On Pentecost Sunday the Maryknoll Family in Manyani hosted the KU postgraduate Small Christian Community of St. Augustine. We had mass together at the main hall and later a shared meal. In the afternoon from 2 pm we had the Feast Day of St. Kizito SCC. The majority were young men and women. Mostly aged between 24 years to 35 years. It was so vibrant and we had Fr. Lance and Fr. Snyder in attendance. One thing that was most interesting was during the jumuiya a young man proposed to his fiancée. It was a surprise indeed. It was the young lady's birthday. And within the birthday day was the engagement ring right inside the cake. As she cut the cake, not known to her, the ring that was in the small box in the cake was removed and the young man went on his knees and proposed to her. I could remember the reason that we young people go to jumuiya is to express ourselves and talk about our relationships. And everyone got so excited, people were shouting and clapping for joy. And Nick Mulei, one of our Maryknoll, prospect candidates shouted at the top most of his voice. The two who are the engaged are Patience and Pascal.

On this Feast of the Ugandan Martyrs, 3 June 2022 let us pray in solidarity with SCC members whose Patron Saints are Charles Lwanga, Kizito, John Muzeeyi, Matia Mulumba, Joseph Mukasa Balikuddembe and others.

10 members from St. Kizito and St. Monica's SCCs (four women, three men, a youth and two children) gathered at the Maryknoll Society Gleason House in Nairobi, Kenya to watch John Siyumbu's moving Priesthood Ordination at Maryknoll, New York, USA on Friday, 3 June, 2022 on YouTube on the big screen. The picture was very clear and the sound perfect. The highlight was when Father Lance Nadeau, MM spoke in Luyia. Everyone cheered. Congratulations Mwanajumuiya Padri John Siyumbu, MM. Many prayers. Oyee.

We follow the mantra *think globally, act locally*. Our St. Kizito Small Christian Community (SCC) in Nairobi, Kenya promotes care of the earth and ecology/environment concerns especially during Lent. On Good Friday I take an empty waste paper basket and walk around the perimeter of the Maryknoll Society compound in Nairobi. I collected stray paper, bags and plastic bottles, often stuck in the hedges. I fill at least one basket of trash. I am reminded of the German proverb: *If everyone sweeps in front of his or her house, the whole world will be clean.*

6. Small Christian Community Model of Parish Church: A Case Study of Training SCC and Parish Leaders in Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya

By Alphonse C. L. Omolo

Overview

In their declaration in the 1973 Plenary Assembly in Kenya, the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa ([AMECEA](#)) Bishops said:

“We are convinced that in these countries of Eastern Africa, it is time for the Church to become really ‘local’. We believe that in order to achieve this we have to insist on building Church life and work on the Small Communities”. (AFER 16/1-2, 1974, p. 4).

Indeed, in Eastern Africa people live, act, and associate on the level of smaller neighborhood communities i.e., rural villages, or urban estate communities. These integral community settings provide unlimited options for the Church in Eastern Africa to insert her life and work into the daily occurrences of the People of God. The first goal of the AMECEA Pastoral Strategic Plan 2014 – 2024 was to promote new and deeper evangelization. The experience in the formation and training of SCCs and parish leaders discussed in this case study is anchored on training personnel to run SCCs.” This is the first strategy of the number one objective “to revitalize and utilize SCCs as models of evangelization at the grassroots” detailed in the AMECEA Strategic Plan.

Thus, to actualize the strategy to train the lay faithful to effectively manage and facilitate their SCCs, content influenced by the local contexts of the SCCs in the specific parishes in the Archdiocese of Kisumu in Western Kenya was prepared. In the last quarter of 2021 and early 2022, three parishes took part in the training and formation of the SCCs members and parish leaders.

In their research published in the inspiring book *Gathered and Sent*, Lee and Cowan (2003) explain that SCCs leaders deserve focused pastoral formation. And that such leadership pastoral formation is a gift not only to the SCCs but also to the larger parish and diocesan church. Orobator (2013), in his paper “New Way of Becoming Church: Practice, Progress, and Prospects,” argues that the future of SCCs must include the interest of the ecclesiastical leadership and their commitment to the formation and empowerment of the lay faithful. Healey (2022), while discussing the AMECEA Study Conference of 1976 in his e-book *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of SCCs in Eastern Africa* emboldens the systematic formation with attention to SCCs materials, tools, skills, and development of SCCs facilitators as a key pastoral priority. See [APPENDIX: 27 Online E-Resource Materials on the On-going Formation and Training of Small Christian Community \(SCC\) Members](#).

These admissions and expansive personal hands-on experience in the local, national, regional, and international levels in the setting up, promoting, and strengthening of SCCs are the essential foundation upon which this case study is premised. This involved the assessment of the existing SCCs’ pastoral settings in the parishes through meetings with the parish priests and parish lay leadership. This informed the preparation of the training content to address the pastoral challenges identified during the exploratory meetings. The training on SCCs started at the sub-parishes on the basic level but upgraded to the final training for the parish council

leaders. There was a total of 12 one-day SCCs training sessions at the sub-parish levels and three one-day training sessions at the parish levels. A total of 450 members and leaders of the SCCs (distributed between the three parishes, women and men, young adults, middle-aged and elderly) participated in the training. Constant follow-up was done through the parish priests and the leaders to determine any value additions or big wins arising from the ongoing training.

Identifying the parishes

Inspired by the strategic plan discussed earlier and the rallying call to promote and facilitate the setting up of SCCs across the AMECEA region, the AMECEA SCCs training team successfully actualized one such training in the Metropolitan Diocese of Kisumu in 2017 attended by 36 young priests. The Parish Priest of the St. James the Apostles Magadi Catholic Parish, upon the excitement from the knowledge gained from this training was the first to call for the formation and capacity strengthening of his sub-parishes and parish leaders on SCCs. Thus, and following the sentiment of Lee and Cowan (2003), the church will thrive through perpetual renewal in a free decision of faith by the Christians in the midst of a secular world. The Parish Priest of the St. Monica Catholic Parish Nyamasaria gathered the SCCs' training idea from one of the parish council leaders. Four years earlier, the leader had organized an SCCs' training for his sub-parish. Even though the training (which took place in the church hall) was approved by the then parish priest, he did not personally attend or officially open it. The Parish Priest from St. Dominic Catholic Parish Kianja became aware of the training (in a meet-up with the Parish Priest of St. Monica) while the St. Monica parish training was ongoing and expressed interest in similar training for his parish.

Coincidentally, the Parish Priest of the St. Dominic Catholic Parish Kianja attended a required postgraduate course on SCCs at the Tangaza University College in Nairobi during his pastoral theology studies. Hence, his aspirations toward the effective functioning of SCCs were planted then.

Assessing parish pastoral challenges for SCCs

The preparation and use of basic questions helped in exploring and evaluating the existing pastoral conditions in the parish in relation to the SCCs. This follows the sentiments of Chimombo et al., (2018) in the AMECEA training handbook for SCCs facilitators *Strengthening the Growth of Small Christian Communities in Africa*. Such questions included but were not limited to:

- How many SCCs are there in the parish, when and how were they established and how are they located?
- How many members do they have, how often and where do they conduct their meetings?
- What do the faithful do during the meetings, what is the length of the meetings, and who facilitates such meetings?
- How are SCCs integrated into the pastoral structure of the parish and how are the SCCs represented on the parish pastoral council?
- Are there any consistent formation or training (for members and leaders) or general activities in the parish concerning the SCCs?
- What do they consider to be the biggest hindrance to the effective functioning and the thriving of the SCCs in the parish?

The aim of these and additional explorative questions is to help identify pastoral challenges getting in the way of the setting up, promoting, and effective functioning of the SCCs in the parish. Of great importance is the fact that each parish and parish neighborhood has its own

unique culture and characteristics. And as reinforced by Baranowski (1988) in his book *Creating Small Faith Communities*, it is critical to understand the history of the parish, racial and ethnic groups, and types of neighborhoods within the parish location. It is upon this exploration that a strategy on how to proceed with the formation and training options and the timing of the next steps for the SCCs and the parish emerged. It is imperative to consider the fact that there can never be a 'one size fits all' approach to training or formation due to the individual nature of each parish.

Emerging parish pastoral concerns for SCCs

For obvious reasons, the outcome of these assessments varied from one SCC to the next and from parish to parish. Important to note is the fact that some of the assessed parishes were partly located within mixed urban and rural settings. While some of the sub-parishes were within peri-urban neighborhoods and some (not many distances away) were in a rural neighborhood with a homestead-to-homestead setting. As such, the outcome of the SCCs evaluation questions was wide-ranging. A great deal of the items documented below has been discussed in several forums organized to generate views that can help improve the conditions and functioning of SCCs not only in Eastern Africa but also in other countries of the world. These include but are not limited to:

- Scarcity of clarity on what is an SCC and what should happen in them.
- The misrepresentation about the number of members for each SCC, how often and for how long should the SCCs meeting take place.
- The continuously escalating parish and diocesan financial responsibilities that are overburdening the SCCs members.
- The social burdens of the individual and group members of the SCCs and the common socio-cultural impediments.
- The absence of inclusive and representative leadership and the non-use of a common language during the SCCs meetings remains a critical challenge in the SCCs with mixed ethnic and racial communities.
- The unanswered question about the absence of men and youth in the daily life of the SCCs.
- The challenge of leadership, leadership, and facilitation skills gap in the SCCs.
- Inadequate or absence of any training or basic theological formation initiative by the parish for the lay faithful and the SCCs leaders.
- The case of the 'diaspora membership' in the SCCs and the challenge of keeping to the recommended geographical neighborhood memberships.

These and many other concerns not documented here came up very strongly during the explorative consultations with the parish priests and a representation of the parish pastoral lay council leaders for the three parishes. These questions and concerns remained significant during all the training sessions. Thus, becoming the foundation upon which, the training contents were designed and delivered as detailed below. The consultative sessions were concluded by the preparation of a training calendar for the SCCs leaders at the sub-parish and parish levels. Important to note is that even though all the leaders of the SCCs were encouraged to attend the training at their sub-parishes, the SCCs members were also welcomed to take part if they had the space to do so.

Starting with the local experience

The settings for the training varied from sub-parish to sub-parish. Some of the training took place at the sub-parish prayer houses (centers) or in the house of one of the parish or sub-parish

leaders. Lunches were prepared at the training venues and the nearby houses of the SCCs leaders or members. For some of the sub-parishes, a packed lunch or snack sufficed. The training was offered on a *pro bono publico* but the leaders arranged for a token to cover the basic costs of facilitation i.e. video projector, facilitators transport, and other logistics. These arrangements were all made at the local levels by the leaders with the support of the parish priests and parish councils. The training content was based on the outcome of the consultative meeting discussed above and started with the exploration of the experience and understanding of the participants about SCCs. This is inspired by Baranowski's (1988) sentiments that the circumstances in the local SCCs and the wider parish environment must be factored into the plan and design of the lay formation and training blueprint while preparing the contents. Chimombo et al., (2018) reinforce that such training sessions and contents should be based on the concrete experience of the participants while the role of the trainer is to realign them with similar experiences and the existing historical, socio-cultural, and theological underpinnings. The training areas at the sub-parishes level included:

- Understanding what an SCC really is and the centrality of the Word of God in SCCs.
- Who are the members of SCCs and how many members should make each SCC?
- Essential characteristics of SCCs – lectionary-based, linked to the parish as communion of communities, neighborhood outreach, and ongoing training and formation.
- Churchhood of SCCs – koinonia, diakonia, kerygma and leitourgia.
- Leadership in SCCs – basic skills, characters, election, roles and duties, transition, etc.
- Leadership obligation to the SCCs, parish planning, and strategic direction,
- The leadership posture, teamwork, and the servant leadership model for the SCCs.
- The role of the SCCs, parish leaders, and parish priests in developing leadership skills in SCCs.
- The common leadership challenges in SCCs and their possible solutions. To further emphasize this, Orobator (2013) explains that SCCs are confronted with diverse pastoral and social challenges that ought to be understood in the local cultural, theological, and sociological contexts.
- The steps for the Bible-sharing meetings in the SCCs.

The training areas for the parishes level included:

- Mutual communication and conversation as the root metaphor of the SCCs – i.e., the life of an SCC is built around mutuality and conversation amongst the members and the environment to which they belong. And from the steward's point of view (not owning the SCCs but making it work perfectly for the sake of members and the church – Lee and Cowan, 2003).
- Two basic qualities of SCCs – “Gathered” and “Sent.” It is like moving through the world with the “BIBLE” in one hand and “NEWSPAPER/RADIO/TELEVISION /SMARTPHONE,” etc. in the other.
- Questions SCCs face – on focus, involvement of members, emotional sharing, behaviour regulation, obligation to each other, and evaluating members of SCCs (Whitehead and Whitehead, 1992).
- Understanding the parish – presbyterium, lay associations, parish sustainability, etc.
- Catholic Social Teaching, identity, and nature of the Church.
- Parish leadership transition, challenges, and possible solutions.
- Roles of the parish pastoral lay council – training and formation of SCCs, parish planning, and parish strategic direction.
-

It is important to emphasize that the design and presentations on these topics must be modeled and grounded on the existing local socio-cultural and spiritual realities.

Training approach

Even though a lot more information had been gathered during the parish explorative meetings, the training sessions were naturally started by exploring the knowledge and understanding of the participants. The questions and answer method were used in plenary, group work, and buzz groups. For example, please share your understanding of an SCC and what happens in them? How do you call an SCC in your local dialect? Please share any characteristics of the members of SCCs that you are aware of. What are the roles of the leaders of SCCs? What leadership challenges have you experienced in your SCCs? This was in line with the guidance of Chimombo et al., 2018 and Healey 2013. These, and additional probing and explorative questions in the plenary steered the learning sessions and participants' engagement during the training.

A very critical requirement for the training to ensure ownership and continuation was the participation of the parish priest in all the sessions of training. This worked very well for all the parishes however, in some instances, the parish priest had to leave for an urgent parish matter and returned immediately after such engagements were concluded.

Considering the ethnic, age, education, and cultural diversities of the participants, the training was conducted in three languages – Luo, Swahili, and English. The plenary and group discussions were organized deliberately to incorporate the young adults, middle-aged, and elderly participants. At the parish level training, Google Document was used to undertake a simple online survey on the questions SCCs face included in the content discussed above. That outcome was instantaneously shared with the participants adding to their learning on the positions of most of the group on the focus of SCC, involvement of members, emotional sharing, behaviour regulations, obligations to each other, and evaluation of members of the SCCs. The sessions ended with questions and answer moments and take-home messages upon which the SCCs leaders can ground the implementation of the lessons learned. The participants had to give their email contacts upon which the facilitator's notes were made available to them in a pdf format. Such notes formed valuable content for the participating leaders when training their own SCCs members. A copy of the steps for the Bible-sharing sessions (developed from the Seven Steps of the LUMKO method) was also availed to the members (in hard and digital copies) to help systematize their weekly SCCs' gatherings. The Seven Steps are found on pages 49-50 of the AMECEA training handbook for SCCs facilitators, Chimombo et al., (2018) *Strengthening the Growth of Small Christian Communities in Africa* that were availed to the participants who wanted to buy them for further readings.

It is important to end the training sessions with a brief evaluation by the participants and a 'sending off ceremony' by the parish priest. Now that the SCCs leaders are equipped with basic skills and tools to facilitate the effective functioning of the SCCs, they are encouraged to go forth and become model animators of SCCs in the parish and beyond.

Follow up

Lee and Cowan (2003), Healey (2012 and 2022), Healey (2017), and Chimombo et al., (2018), reinforce that, decisions on the implementation strategies for the learning outcome must include ideas on follow-up mechanisms. It is important to emphasize that planning for moments for reflection concerning any change that has occurred due to the actualization of the training, must be a critical part of the training at all levels of leadership. Such implementation strategies and evaluation mechanisms must equally underscore both the sociological and the theological

health of the concerned SCCs. Lee and Cowan (2003) argue that we must keep the disciplined rhythm of “reflection-action-reflection” to enhance our understanding of the world and the Word of God since a poorly understood world is as disastrous as a poorly understood Word of God.

While the dates for the in-person follow-up sessions are being explored, from telephone conversations, informal meetups, and visits with the parish priests and a few leaders, there are positive indications that the SCCs leaders are experiencing a great deal of motivation in implementing the training outcomes. For example, the use of systematic steps in conducting the Bible sharing sessions, prioritizing the Word of God in the SCCs meetings, keeping the meeting of the SCCs to one hour, and giving each member the chance to share how the Word of God is appealing to them and consistent plan for outreach to the needy in their neighborhoods and beyond, etc.

Important points to emphasize during the follow up are mainly:

- What has changed since the initial sub-parish and parish level training?
- What additional training and formation areas are required and at what level?
- What next steps are required to strengthen and promote SCCs in the parish?

Lessons learned

This training occasioned treasure-trove of lessons at different levels that are critical for visioning the setting up, promotion, and strengthening of SCCs now and in the future. A few of the emerging ideas are detailed below:

1. There is minimal understanding of what SCCs really are, membership limits and diversity, and what Christians should do in them.
2. The importance of sharing the daily life experiences during the SCCs meetings and the centrality of the Word of God in SCCs is still not well understood by the Catholic faithful.
3. Financial overburdens (i.e., solidarity fund, social support amongst faithful, etc.) upon the SCCs (especially within humble neighborhoods) remain a hindrance to the promotion of SCCs in parishes without creative options.
4. The “sent” character of the SCCs (especially beyond the membership) is less understood by the members of the SCCs. A great deal of these SCCs are likely to be considered more or less of a self-support group rather than SCCs.
5. Active participation of the parish priests is key in any training of the lay faithful that seek to shape and promote the functioning of the SCCs.
6. Inadequate leadership skills in the functioning of the SCCs remain a key impediment to the thriving of the SCCs in parishes.
7. Basic theological formation and training on group dynamics remain a missing lens for the SCCs members to read the signs of the times and exploit the opportunities available around them.
8. Any training or formation that seeks to improve the functioning of the SCCs in parishes must consider the local context in the planning and the designing of content.

Conclusions

To claim authentically the title “SCC” is to integrate the *inner* (gathered) and *public* (sent) dimensions of SCCs. It is like moving through the world with the “Bible” in one hand and the “Newspaper/Radio/Television/Smartphone,” etc. on the other. Being in an SCC demands a high level of relationship and task orientation. Consequently, SCCs must provide a strong sense of belonging to members as well as be able to address questions of justice and mercy. Members

of the SCCs must explore and realize their own power to change their living conditions by popularising action-oriented Bible reflections (Omolo 2005). In addition, mutuality and conversation should remain at the heart of the inner life and the public life of the SCCs. This can then awaken the question, how can groups of Catholic faithful organize around a common good? And with this occurrence, a safe and favorable environment is created not only for the membership of the SCCs but also for their neighborhood communities, and beyond.

The keenness to this SCCs training assignment on the part of the facilitator, the parish priest, and the parish lay leaders cannot be emphasized well enough. It must be a compelling desire on the part of the parish priest and the parish lay leaders to realize functioning SCCs in their parish. It is only such enthralling aspirations that can navigate the actualization of the planning and implementation of the training outcomes at the SCCs and the parish levels. The opportunity, warmth, and support that was availed by the parish priests and the parish lay leaders of the three parishes involved in the training cannot be taken for granted. The incomparable obligation and interest in realizing efficacious SCCs cannot go without recognition and earnest appreciation.

This was intensive one-day training for each sub-parish and at the parish levels. Over and above, is a recommended training for a parish team of facilitators for select members and leaders of the SCCs for not less than three days. These individuals must be selected from leaders and members of the SCCs who have shown great commitment to the setting up and promotion of SCCs, individuals who are inherently facilitators. These teams of trainers can ensure the continuation of training and formation at the SCCs and at the parish levels. Similarly, a team of SCCs trainers can be trained at a diocesan, national, and regional bishop's conference levels. Such teams of SCCs facilitators must be inclusive and should receive continuous capacity building and refresher training.

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7. Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as Gathered and Sent: A Case Study of Two Online SCCs Courses

By Alphonse C. L. Omolo

NOTE: These two courses are part of the Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM) of Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA.

Overview

Perhaps, the best place to start this conversation on the experience gained from the Loyola Institute for Ministry ([LIM](#)) online course on Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is to evoke the foresight of Lee and Cowan that SCCs are *gathered* and *sent*. In their visionary book, *Gathered and Sent: The Mission of Small Church Communities Today*, Lee and Cowan (2003) elucidate that: “Our conviction rooted in both theology and sociology, that a [Small Christian] Community is both gathered and sent. As gathered, it attends to the conversation of its inner life. As sent, it carries on a conversation with the larger world beyond its immediate constituency” (pg. 31).

The SCCs gather in the spirit of mutuality to pray together, relate with one another, share the Word of God, and discern what God is asking of them as individuals and as a group. They gather to support one another in their spiritual and social journeys. Rutechura (2013) reinforces that, mutual sharing of prayer, meal (sustenance), wisdom, and nurturing of the pastoral vision in the light of the Word are the hallmarks of the life of an SCC. According to Paul the Apostle, (in *Romans* 12:5), even though there are so many of us, we make one body of Christ, and we are joined to one another. Lee and Cowan have christened this relationship, the *inner life* of an SCC. This has to do with what happens when the SCCs gather. However, in order to put their faith into action, members of the SCCs must engage with the world of which they are a part. This involves participating in the works of mercy and the works of justice beyond their memberships. Guzmán (2013), Healey (2013), and Omolo (2005) consider these outreach responses as neighborhood lay ministries and a Vatican II theology of the People of God. The members of the SCCs must recognize the fact that their communities and the broader society are the settings in which the life of an SCC happens. While putting their faith into action, they are encouraged to seek far-reaching partnerships (broad-based organizing) in their desire to evangelize the world and attain the common good. This aspect of the SCC we shall call the *public life* of an SCC.

While engaging the students (laywomen, laymen, religious, and priests) in an in-depth appraisal of the *inner* and *public* life of SCCs, the local settings of their own countries, dioceses, parishes, and SCCs become the key premise upon which learning is generated. LIM provides a conducive online opportunity for the students to explore the meaning of all these arguments and their consequences for integral human and faith development.

As a case study of an online learning platform, this paper explores the LIM’s inner life and public life of SCCs courses as a model for championing pathways for setting up and uplifting leadership capabilities in SCCs. This includes the chance to promote SCCs as a vehicle for evangelizing parishes, their neighborhoods, and beyond. The case study includes the course experience for the academic years 2020, 2021, and 2022. The partnership between LIM and the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa ([AMECEA](#)) can be likened

to the African proverb that states, “*If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together.*” According to Healey (2022), for any intervention to be long-term and sustaining, the participation of others in a shared vision is the best approach. Gratitude for expansive broad-based networking with several Family Foundations in the United States of America who provided the scholarship for the 29 students who have participated in the course. This case study emphasizes the cooperation, and commitments of the students, the AMECEA, LIM, and the Catholic Family Foundations that have outstandingly contributed to the success of the course. It can be confidently stated that it is now upon the represented Bishops’ Conferences or dioceses to make good use of the knowledge, tools, and skills gained by the students throughout the course.

The history of LIM, the founding of the partnership, the SCCs course contents, the selection and admission of the students, the course experience, and appraisal by the students are well-documented in the sections that follow.

Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM)

Founded in 1968 as part of the Notre Dame Seminary in New Orleans, then moved to Loyola University in 1978, and following the call to put faith into action, Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM) started offering online courses in 2000. In 2010, LIM’s degree [courses](#) (Bachelor of Arts in Ministry and Theology, Master of Pastoral Studies (MPS), Master of Religious Education, Certificate in Theology and Ministry, Dual MPS/Master of Business Administration, Dual MPS/Master of Science in Counselling, Dual MPS/Master of Science in Criminology, and Justice,) were fully online. The Small Christian Communities courses are offered under the Masters of Pastoral Studies degree. Thus, LIM offers graduate courses, continuing education, and advanced level certificates to meet the specific needs of its diverse community of students.

The SCCs courses prioritize the experience the students bring into the course by giving essential attention to practical theology. This involves comparing daily lived and faith experiences in the light of the Word of God in order to act effectively and faithfully in the Church and world today. Pope Francis, in his Wednesday Audience (Francis, 26 June 2019), explains that “What is extraordinary becomes ordinary, and everyday life becomes the site of the manifestation of living Christ.” The Holy Father reinforces that our communities must be places for experiencing communion, places for encountering God, places for exercising the works of solidarity, and places that are open to the heavenly Jerusalem.

The creation and the commencement of the SCCs course emerged from the LIM’s aspiration to develop and offer courses that respond to the signs of the times and are impactful in tackling the worrying needs of the world today (Loyola University, 2022). Fortunately for LIM, AMECEA (and upon its 2014 – 2024 strategic plan that prioritized training of leaders for SCCs, Chimombo et al., 2018 and Chimombo et al., 2022) was seeking ideas on how to effectively realize this strategic intervention. This case study concerns the two online modules of the Small Christian Communities courses – the *Inner life* and the *Public life* of the SCCs.

The Recruitment of the Students for the LIM SCCs Courses

The provision of the LIM SCCs course follows the decision of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) to make SCC a pastoral priority during their Plenary Meeting of 1973 in Kenya. Thus, the training and development of SCCs materials

were encouraged (Chimombo et al., 2018 and Chimombo et al., 2022). Lee and Cowan (2003) explain that lay men and lay women can gain access to and make good use of essential SCCs materials without becoming theological scholars themselves. It can be emphasized that when SCCs are functional, local neighborhoods and communities, parishes, and dioceses thrive too. The availability of the LIM online SCCs course provided an opportunity to accomplish this vital objective of the AMECEA with minimal financial constraints. Fortunately for these initial pioneering moments, a couple of Catholic Family Foundations in the United States of America provided tuition fees for ten students for each course from 2020 to 2022. Additional students were recruited from the larger student family at LIM and outside the University community.

LIM's well-established distance-education delivery system and its pragmatic "*practical theology*" approach were the most fitting for the diverse categories of students from Africa and the Western world. Lee and Cowan (2003) maintain that practical theology is a theology of praxis. It provides the chance for the students to reflect on their social lives in the light of the Word of God. By so doing, their faith and social well-being is wholistically reinforced.

The students were recruited through the AMECEA Pastoral Department by means of communication to the Bishops' Conferences. Upon the local selection of a pair or more students, the potential candidates were asked to undertake a simple survey (through Google Docs) that helped to understand their capability and SCCs' background before they were given the chance and the link to apply through the LIM application systems. It was from this process that ten students were admitted to the course bearing in mind the representation in terms of their gender, laity, priests, and religious. In the academic period 2020 to 2022, twenty-nine (29) students successfully went through the course. The students were from (Ireland (1), Ethiopia (1), the USA (2), Nigeria (3), Tanzania (3), Uganda (6), and Kenya (13). The 29 students were distributed as follows: sisters (3), laymen (7), laywomen, (8), and priests (11).

Course Content

The LIM course in SCCs explores the *inner* life and the *public* life of the SCCs. Each course takes one complete semester and includes about 15 modules (depending on the designated length of the semester) delivered on a week-by-week basis. The two courses provided the students with the unique chance to integrate theological underpinnings with their lived SCCs experiences on a reflection-praxis-reflection basis. Lee and Cowan (2003) explain this as the engagement of grassroots theological reflection in conversation with the larger church's mission to discourse with God's intention for the world. Orobator (2013) and Rutechura (2013) reinforce that reflection on the Word of God in SCCs provides the premise for discussing common concerns and social action of the local faithful. According to Healey (2022), while citing the ideas of John Dewey (world-renowned American philosopher and educator) we learn from reflecting on experience. Thus, the use of challenging questions and probing deeper is key in discovering boundlessly hidden meanings.

At the end of the course, the students gained the knowledge and skills required to facilitate functional SCCs in their parishes or dioceses. The students came to the realization of how practical theology happens in the gathering and outreach experience of the SCCs (Lee and Cowan 2003 and Healey 2022). This further confirms practical theology as an appreciated mode of conversation in the SCCs.

The *Inner Life of SCCs* explores SCCs as gathered, that is, best practices within SCCs. Course topics include communication and conversation skills in SCCs, community in church history

and as mediating structure, practical theology, the churchhood of SCCs, leadership and consensus-building, lay co-responsibility, and breaking open the Word. The *Public Life of SCCs* examines SCCs as sent out into the world to announce and act on God's love, justice, and mercy. Course topics include mission, Catholic Social Teaching, faith engagement, the socio-cultural context of SCCs, challenges of SCCs, youth and young adults, breaking open the Word, significance and future of SCCs.

Course Delivery Methods

Students are engaged in a weekly discussion centered on thematic questions delivered through the Canvas platform online. To enhance the quality of these weekly student engagements, the students are subdivided into discussion groups with changing student discussion leaders. Each student is tasked to post a designated number of postings and respond to the postings and questions from their course mates and the course instructor. Such postings (of specified lengths) have to be done within a stipulated timeframe so as to allow other students the chance to read through and seek any clarification before the end of the module week.

Adequate digital learning materials are provided for each module i.e., textbooks, theological papers, audios, and videos. The students are engaged in lectionary-based *Bible* sharing through the ZOOM platform on a fortnightly basis. Such *Bible* sharing gatherings are facilitated by the students themselves in a rotational form just as it happens in their own local SCCs. Additionally, and on a fortnightly basis, the students are engaged in a spiritual formation exercise based on the tradition of Ignatian spirituality. This helps the students to develop a life of prayer and an in-depth sense of their calling in the Church. With this, LIM intends to integrate the spiritual growth of the students into their theological education. As such, their relationship with God has a great chance to invigorate their ministries. Students make informal spiritual exercises based on selected themes and *Bible* passages.

Students' internalization and comprehension of the course contents is assessed throughout the course by means of their weekly responses and two essays for each course. The essays are planned for the middle and the end of each semester. On successful performance i.e., on the graded classwork and essays, students are awarded certificates and transcripts detailing their participation and accomplishments. On requests by the student, and when required to do so, the academic transcripts can also be sent directly to any institution of higher education. To continue to the next session, students have to present proof of application of the knowledge they gathered from the initial course in their SCCs, parish, or diocese. This can be an outcome of a workshop, a talk, or training conducted to help set up, promote, and strengthen SCCs in their localities.

Model for Future Online Courses on SCCs

The LIM *Inner Life* and *Public Life* of SCC course is a success story worth replicating as an opportunity and a model to inform future courses on SCCs. The lessons from the Covid-19 Pandemic moments favorably appraise the online/virtual spaces of learning as the future 'classrooms' upon which courses, workshops, and conferences on SCCs in the AMECEA countries and the world over can be successfully implemented. The 'new normal' in this digital world is online/virtual learning. If well designed and effectively delivered, it is cost-effective in terms of resources required and limited movement of the participants to be in physical or face-to-face learning/meeting locations. In view of this, the Loyola SCCs course is a model

that can be utilized by the AMECEA Pastoral Department and the AMECEA institutes of higher learning (i.e., Catholic University of Eastern Africa - [CUEA](#), AMECEA Pastoral Institute – API in Eldoret Kenya, etc.) to facilitate and coordinate online/virtual SCCs courses, training or workshops at all levels in the future.

Lessons Learned

1. Coordination of the recruitment of the candidates for admission to the LIM inner and public life of SCCs courses at the bishop's conferences level is essential. It is important to ensure a balanced allocation of students across the conferences.
2. Some of the students nominated by the dioceses (conferences) were already too busy with their pastoral duties or ministries that it became a great challenge for them to allocate the 6 to 9 hours (required) per week for the course.
3. Some of the selected and admitted students had limited-lived experiences on SCCs. As such, they encountered significant difficulties in writing essays that prioritized the analysis of actual conditions in SCCs and their surrounding neighborhoods.
4. The students with limited SCCs lived-in experience especially from Eastern Africa easily confused the term Small Groups (commonly used in the USA in references to SCCs – Lee and Cowan 2003, Healey 2022, etc.) to mean any other small groups in their parishes including clubs, sodalities, and associations founded in their parishes with no SCCs character at all.
5. Internet limitations and instability in some of the locations in Eastern and West Africa negatively impacted the chances for the students to access study materials and deliver their course assignments in time.
6. Severe weather i.e., the frequent occurrences of storms and hurricanes (i.e., Delta, Laura, Zeta, Ida, etc.) disrupted the learning and participation of the students living in New Orleans and the wider State of Louisiana.
7. Lay students added great value to the learning by bringing in their actual and daily lived experiences in SCCs and the social conditions of their neighborhoods.
8. Working with students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds (i.e., Eastern Africa, West Africa, United States of America, and Europe) widened the learning contexts considering the wide-ranging knowledge and lived-in experience on SCCs they brought into the course.
9. The virtual ZOOM face-to-face sessions (i.e., the fortnightly *Bible* sharing meetings) helped in cementing group dynamics, and students' relationships in addition to inspiring their commitment and performance in the course.
10. To achieve an in-depth understanding of what SCC really is and what should happen in them, the students should complete the two courses (the *Inner Life* and the *Public Life* of SCCs) as designed by LIM.

Moving Forward

The inner and public life of SCCs is centred on concrete experience in SCCs. As such, a critical requirement for the students attending this course is a lived experience of SCCs and not a hypothetical knowledge or counterfactual reasoning about SCCs. Local (conference, dioceses, etc.) student selection mechanisms and processes need to take this into account. In addition, such selection of students needs to consider an equitable balance between the gender, religious, lay, and priests. The participation of the students from the USA and Europe makes the course a unique multicultural experience. A deliberate strategy is encouraged to attract such students to join the course.

A concerted effort is required while working on the funding so that the attendance of the students in the two courses (*Inner and Public Life of SCCs*) is assured upon their admission. In order to ensure an impactful outcome from the course, the AMECEA and other regions can set up a network of alumni students who can remain, ambassadors of the SCCs, AMECEA, and LIM in their regions and localities. Such networks and groupings can be operationalized through a clearly crafted coordination via any chosen social media (Skype, ZOOM, Google Meet, WhatsApp, etc.) platform.

Individually, the conferences should make adequate use of the graduates from the SCCs course whether lay, religious, or priests to help in the setting up and promotion of SCCs across their local parishes and dioceses. Such individuals can also form the national, diocesan, or parish teams of SCCs facilitators/trainers. It should be encouraged that each parish commits to establishing a team of SCCs facilitators/trainers to continuously build the capacity of the faithful and leaders of the SCCs from time to time. Such commitment should be accompanied by clear action plans and budgetary allocations to ensure their fulfillment. As discussed earlier, the formation and training of SCCs is one of the key priorities of the AMECEA Bishops in their 2014 – 2024 strategic plan. Thus, these online SCCs courses provide an ideal chance to put together a group of trainers to help implement this strategic commitment at different levels of the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa.

Conclusion

By means of aggressive inoculations, many nations have made great paces in mitigating the ‘fangs’ of the Covid-19 Pandemic. However, it will take more than the dynamic effort of a single nation or the cooperation of a single region to bring the world into full restoration from the Covid-19 Pandemic. The online learning platforms continue to provide valuable openings to impart and gain knowledge without, or with reduced movement to any physical location. The LIM courses (Inner and Public Life) on SCCs remain a cut above the edge in the reading and responding to the signs of the times. In the course evaluation, the students agreed in unanimity that the stated course objectives in the syllabus were effectively met, the course delivery methods stimulated critical, analytical, creative, and independent thinking among the students and the provided learning materials were adequate and beneficial.

When asked their views about the strength of the course, the students responded that it was an eye-opener into the emerging realities of SCCs. It brought out in the open plenty of limitations of awareness on what SCCs really are and what their roles and purpose should be. The course has also simplified what the leaders and members of the SCCs need to do to remain functional and relevant to the calling of synodality and subsidiarity as explained by Pope Francis (Healey 2022). The reflection-praxis-reflection approach provided the students with the premise for reflecting on the pastoral ministries they are engaged in and drawing new strategies for pastoral care. The skills gained will be valuable in reflecting on and improving pastoral conditions in their parishes and dioceses. The students concluded that the course has provided them with new knowledge about SCCs, given them the tools and practical skills to facilitate effective functional SCCs, and nurtured in them the desire to promote the setting up and the development of SCCs in their local parishes and dioceses. Even though there was a fortnightly ZOOM video gathering for *Bible* sharing, some of the students cited the inability to have an in-person interaction with their instructor and course mates as the one thing they missed in the course. Internet connection challenges (especially for students based in rural or mountain locations) was also mentioned as another weak point, especially during the ZOOM video meetings.

The 29 students (detailed above) who have gone through this course remain a critical resource in the setting up and the promotion of SCCs in the AMECEA and the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM) regions. They can be part of a network of pioneer SCCs facilitators and training teams in their regions.

The overall gap in this course is a sustainable funding strategy and strategic coordination to ensure a continuous flow of groups of students attending the course and linking their learning to their concrete local SCCs situations.

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Alphonse C. L. Omolo (Ph.D.)
Adjunct Lecturer, Loyola Institute for Ministry,
Loyola University, New Orleans, USA
Consultant and Member of AMECEA SCCs Training Team
alphonceomolo@gmail.com
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5. SCCs Promote Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Eastern Africa

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.⁵⁶³

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).⁵⁶⁴

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, 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 14 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. African Christians need to live out deeper Gospel values that sometimes go counter to certain traditional values of African culture.

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

⁵⁶³ O'Halloran, *Living Cells*, p. 203.

⁵⁶⁴ 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](#).

the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another" (*Ephesians* 4:25). Another translation is "speak the truth in love." A related term is the positive meaning of good and loyal "critical friends:" A group of peers who can speak honestly to us, encouraging our strengths while not ignoring our weaknesses. People we can trust to critique our work and remind us of what we didn't see or weren't even aware of. Friends who could speak openly and truthfully to us, but also with kindness and understanding.

So Mwoleka challenged our SCCs to live on a deeper level and to grow together by speaking the truth in love.

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.⁵⁶⁵

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 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.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁵ Laurenti Magesa, *What is Not Sacred? African Spirituality*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013 and Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2014, pp. 190-91.

⁵⁶⁶ Paul Bere, "The Word of God as Transformative Power in Reconciling African Christians" in Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator (ed.), *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace – the Second Africa Synod*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011 and Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2011, p. 55.

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.⁵⁶⁷ 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.⁵⁶⁸

St. Martin de Porres SCC in Holy Trinity Parish, Buruburu I in Nairobi Archdiocese had a similar experience – a critical incident⁵⁶⁹ -- 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.⁵⁷⁰ During the SCC Course at Hekima University 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

⁵⁶⁷ 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.

⁵⁶⁸ 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.

⁵⁶⁹ "Critical incident" is a specific term used in Pastoral Theological Reflection (PTR). It refers to a life changing experience or 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. It has a deeper meaning in Spanish as explained by Jesuit American theologian John Coleman, SJ.

⁵⁷⁰ Based on Rose Musimba's conversations with the author in Nairobi, Kenya in 2010 and 2011.

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.⁵⁷¹

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*,⁵⁷² 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.⁵⁷³ Stories and examples from Eastern Africa are found in Chapter Three on "Church as the [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."⁵⁷⁴

⁵⁷¹ Hillary Awiti, MHM (complier), "Suggestions on the Peacebuilding Process in Christ the King Parish, Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya, Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2009.

⁵⁷² Origin in the mid-18th century in the sense of a "a talk between tribespeople and traders." From Portuguese *palavra* "word" and from Latin *parabola* "comparison."

⁵⁷³ 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>

⁵⁷⁴ 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)

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.⁵⁷⁵

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:

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.

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.

⁵⁷⁵ 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)

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 Prayer 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.⁵⁷⁶

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 of justice, reconciliation and peace...People, especially the youth, will be fascinated with the images that are embedded in the stories told.⁵⁷⁷

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

There is that great African proverb – *until the lions produce (have) their own historians, the story (history) of the hunt will always glorify (glorify only) 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-

⁵⁷⁶ 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)

⁵⁷⁷ Leonard Shayo, "How SCCs Promote Justice, Reconciliation and Peace in Kenya," Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2013, p. 10.

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 Tegat (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.⁵⁷⁸ 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 Kikuyu languages. Everyone in the SCCs participated in a communal meal of reconciliation with both Kalenjin and Kikuyu food served and eaten by the whole community. Everyone agreed that this violence and wrongdoing should never happen again. Until today (June, 2018) the peace continues and the local people are forgetting the past disputes.⁵⁷⁹

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

⁵⁷⁸ Our Eastern Africa 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.

⁵⁷⁹ 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)

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: “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.”

This present book 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.

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 our SCCs as we sit around in a circle and read and reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday, we feel

that we women are equals and have a voice.”⁵⁸⁰ Often women take leadership 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 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.⁵⁸¹

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.⁵⁸² 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:

⁵⁸⁰ “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 4 October, 2023, <https://afriprov.tangaza.ac.ke/afri-story/we-women-are-equals-and-have-a-voice/>

⁵⁸¹ 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.

⁵⁸² See Healey, Joseph and Donald Sybertz. *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa and Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), p. 286.

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).⁵⁸³
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,⁵⁸⁴ a white goat and even a baby.
5. Ethnic groups in Cameroon: 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.⁵⁸⁵
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. Malagache, Madagascar: with outstretched arms holding hands and

⁵⁸³ 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.

⁵⁸⁴ 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).

⁵⁸⁵ The Zaire Rite (French: *Rite zairois*) or Roman Missal for the Dioceses of Zaire is a variation of the common Mass of the Roman Catholic Church. While containing many of the elements of the Ordinary Form of the Mass of the Roman Rite, it incorporates elements from sub-Saharan African culture, particularly Congolese, a process referred to as inculturation. Additionally, the Zaire Rite may refer to the adjusted sacramental rites used by the Congolese dioceses. It is largely a product of the Second Vatican Council's constitution Sacrosanctum Concilium, particularly the move "for legitimate variations and adaptations to different groups, regions, and peoples, especially in mission lands, provided that the substantial unity of the Roman rite is preserved." Promulgated by the Decree *Zairensium Dioecesium* on 30 April, 1988, by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, the *Missel romain pour les diocèses du Zaïre* (Roman Missal for the Dioceses of Zaire) is an attempt to inculturate the Roman Missal in an African context, inspired by the liturgical reform initiated at the Second Vatican Council. The missal is now officially entitled *Congolese Missal for the dioceses of Zaire*. Wikipedia, retrieved on 23 February, 2020 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zaire_Use

swaying back and forth.

13. Marakwet, Kenya: green leaves; a belt of cowry shells.

14. 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, tap the shoulder and say "Peace." South Sudan and Sudan liturgical dancers also use this symbol in a dance during Eucharistic Celebrations.⁵⁸⁶

15. Pökot⁵⁸⁷ and Turkana, Kenya; Logir, South Sudan: breaking a spear.

16. Sabaot, Kenya: breaking a stick.

17. Several ethnic groups in South Sudan: clap, shake hands and clap again.

18. Sukuma, Tanzania: spittle.

19. 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.

⁵⁸⁶ During two masses at Don Bosco Chapel in the Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement in Arua, Uganda in August, 2018 the Children's Choir and Dance Group performed several different rhythmic dances using this peace symbol in different forms and styles. See the true story "Yes, Peace Is Possible":

In Nairobi, Kenya we created an African Inculturated Small Christian Community (SCC) Mass following the order of the Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo) Rite. The Exchange of Peace took place at the end of the Penitential Rite and before the scripture readings. The goal was that the community of believers would be reconciled and at peace with each other before hearing the Word of God. We wanted to use a genuine African sign of peace so we chose a common sign/symbol from both South Sudan/Sudan and Sierra Leone (opposite ends of the African continent): Place your right hand on the left shoulder of the other person and say "Peace" in your home language/mother tongue. At the end we sang *Bind Us Together, Lord* that is the unofficial worldwide theme song of SCCs. It expresses the conscious solidarity and bonding between SCC members.

Later in Juba, South Sudan I celebrated during a mass on 1 October at St. Theresa of the Child Jesus Cathedral, the patroness of Juba Archdiocese. During the offertory young girls from different ethnic groups (Dinka, Nuer, Shilluk, Logir, etc.) in South Sudan sang and danced a "Peace Prayer." In twos they danced up to each other and placed their right hand on the left shoulder of the other person. It was very moving. These dancing girls taught me that "yes, peace is possible."

⁵⁸⁷ 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).

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).” 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”).

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?”⁵⁸⁸ 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

⁵⁸⁸ “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.

realization of the Church as a Family Model community of believers which reflects the Ecclesiology of communion of Vatican II.⁵⁸⁹

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*.⁵⁹⁰ There is a campaign to promote civic education before the Kenya General 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.”⁵⁹¹ SCCs are encouraged to:

1. Analyze and discuss the drawing (cartoon) on page 8.⁵⁹²
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:

⁵⁸⁹ 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.

⁵⁹⁰ 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.

⁵⁹¹ 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>

⁵⁹² Kenyan Youth Groups perform little plays and skits based on these cartoons as part of the Sunday Homilies.

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.⁵⁹³

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. 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.”⁵⁹⁴

⁵⁹³ Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *The Leadership Handbook* (Swahili is *Maelekezo ya Uongozi*), Nairobi: KCCB Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, 2012.

⁵⁹⁴ “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>

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.”⁵⁹⁵ 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.

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?⁵⁹⁶

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.

⁵⁹⁵ Ndichia Anthony Ndang, MHM, *The Role of SCCs in Mission and Evangelization in Malindi Diocese, Kenya*, Unpublished Long Essay, Tangaza University College (CUEA), 2011, p. 56.

⁵⁹⁶ 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>

During this Election Year in Kenya it is our responsibility in our SCCs to promote civic education on the local level.⁵⁹⁷

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?” We are challenged to participate in civic education programs and to study and reflect on the qualities of good leaders.⁵⁹⁸

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

⁵⁹⁷ 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>

⁵⁹⁸ 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>

members gather) and the public life of SCCs (when SCC members are sent).⁵⁹⁹ 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”⁶⁰⁰ at Hekima University 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.

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

⁵⁹⁹ 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.

⁶⁰⁰ Listed under the area “Methodologies of Evangelization.”

community development, especially at the Small Christian Community level?⁶⁰¹ 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 healthcare, home-based healthcare, 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.

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.⁶⁰²

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

⁶⁰¹ SCCs are used as Case Study Reference Groups in Community Development, Action and Mobilization Studies in two courses at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya.

⁶⁰² Alphonse Omolo, "Small Communities Light up Neighborhoods in Kisumu" in Healey and Hinton, *Small Christian Communities Today*, p. 112. Retrieved from the Google Books Website on 7 February, 2016, https://books.google.co.ke/books?id=YsJ3CAAQBAJ&pg=PT117&lpg=PT117&dq=Alphonse+Omolo+Small+Christian+Communities&source=bl&ots=mxPyDErg3F&sig=Yoi50QjFESycFehgNuK2Z2tXJto&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=Alphonse%20Omolo%20Small%20Christian%20Communities&f=false

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 Spiral⁶⁰³ 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.⁶⁰⁴

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.⁶⁰⁵

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:

⁶⁰³ An important online resource is ADD

⁶⁰⁴ See a fuller explanation in Christine Bodewes, *Parish Transformation in Urban Slums: Voices of Kibera, Kenya*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005.

⁶⁰⁵ Walter Ingosi, "A Challenge of Using Different Languages in a SCC," Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2013, p. 4.

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.⁶⁰⁶

Recently I have been participating in discussions⁶⁰⁷ 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).⁶⁰⁸ Does each phase incorporate and build upon the previous one? Is there a natural evolution for SCC members to become social activists?⁶⁰⁹ 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 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

⁶⁰⁶ 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>

⁶⁰⁷ See exchanges with American theologian layman Terence McGoldrick by email, phone and Skype in July and August, 2013.

⁶⁰⁸ These stages or types of church are based on Francisco Claver, *Making of a Local Church*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008, pp. 92-94.

⁶⁰⁹ See Francisco Claver, for an elaboration of this natural evolution of BECs, chapter 7.

theological reflection on the Eucharistic politics implicit in the Small Christian Community.⁶¹⁰

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.”⁶¹¹

The planning and realization of the African Year of Reconciliation (AYR), recommended by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* 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 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 *Africae Munus* 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.” 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

⁶¹⁰ 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.

⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

Family is the ‘Patron of the Small Christian Communities’ to which all SCCs have to be consecrated.”⁶¹²

At the conclusion of their deliberations, having been enriched by the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus* 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 *Africae Munus, Evangelii Gaudium (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 (*Africae Munus* 21) anchored in truth (*Africae Munus* 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 an enlarged workshop for regional lay delegates involved in the pastoral care of SCCs.⁶¹³

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 (*Africae Munus* 21) anchored in truth (*Africae Munus* 20). Can each SCC choose one concrete practical action of reconciliation on the local level?

I close with Archbishop Jean-Marie Speich, the Apostolic Nuncio in Ghana’s, challenge to the participants at our November, 2014 meeting: to shift from “words and speeches” to feasible recommendations and “facts.” So I 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,

⁶¹² Jean-Marie Speich, “Africa is an “Extended Holy Land,” Nuncio in Ghana Clarifies,” Catholic News Agency for Africa (CANAA), 27 November, 2014.

⁶¹³ “SECAM Workshop Recommends Creation and Strengthening of Small Christian Communities in Africa,” Catholic News Agency for Africa (CANAA), 27 November, 2014.

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 concrete action on the SCCs Facebook Page on our

Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website
www.smallchristiancommunities.org

So far six people have clicked “Like.” **ADD**

6. SCCs' Contribution to the Praxis and Theology of the Church as Family of God in Africa

The 1994 First African Synod developed the specific ecclesial identity of the Church⁶¹⁴ as Family⁶¹⁵ of God in Africa while the 2009 Second African Synod focused more on the pastoral and mission activities of this Church as Family of God in Africa, namely to work toward reconciliation, justice and peace.

St. John Paul II's 1995 Apostolic Exhortation *The Church in Africa* in Number 63 under "The Church as God's Family" states:

Not only did the Synod speak of inculturation, but it also made use of it, taking the *Church as God's Family* as its guiding idea for the evangelization of Africa. The Synod Fathers acknowledged it as an expression of the church's nature particularly appropriate for Africa. For this image emphasizes care for others, solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialog and trust. The new evangelization will thus aim at *building up the Church as Family*, avoiding all ethnocentrism and excessive particularism, trying instead to encourage reconciliation and true communion between different ethnic groups, favoring solidarity and the sharing of personnel and resources among the Particular [Local] Churches, without undue ethnic considerations. "It is earnestly to be hoped that theologians in Africa will work out the theology of the Church as Family with all the riches contained in this concept, showing its complementarity with other images of the Church".⁶¹⁶

⁶¹⁴ The word "church" is specifically used in this book to refer to the Roman Catholic Church, but we have to be sensitive to the other meanings such as the many other Christian Churches (Protestant, Anglican, Evangelical, Pentecostal, etc.). In general, I prefer using "church" with lower case unless it is used in a title.

⁶¹⁵ I prefer to use the word "family" to cover a whole variety of meanings. Magesa and other African theologians and scholars emphasize that "extended family" originates from a Western sociological conception of family structures. For Africans this wide network of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. is simply "family" or on a wider scale "clan." Many have pointed out that this wide family network is the Africans' worst enemy as well as best friend. This family solidarity system (called "the economy of affection") can help needy members, but the more financially successful members can be constantly preyed upon by their "poor cousins."

⁶¹⁶ Section 4 on "African Metaphors of Church" in Chapter Three on "Church as the [Extended] Family of God" describes some African metaphors or images or symbols of church using African proverbs, sayings and stories.

- a. The Church as the Extended Family of God.
- b. The Church as the Clan of Jesus Christ.
- c. The Church as the Universal Family in Christ.

All this presupposes a profound study of the heritage of Scripture and Tradition which the Second Vatican Council presented in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*. This admirable text expounds the doctrine on the church using images drawn from Sacred Scripture such as the Mystical Body, People of God, Temple of the Holy Spirit, Flock and Sheepfold, the House in which God Dwells with Humans. According to the council, the Church is the Bride of Christ, our Mother, the Holy City and the First Fruits of the Coming Kingdom. These images will have to be taken into account when developing, according to the synod's recommendation, an Ecclesiology focused on the idea of the Church as the Family of God. It will then be possible to appreciate in all its richness and depth the statement which is the Dogmatic Constitution's point of departure: "By her relationship with Christ, the church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all humankind".

Pope Benedict XVI's 2011 Apostolic Exhortation *Africa's Commitment* in Number 172 under "Conclusion: "Take Heart; Rise, He Is Calling"" states: "While earnestly desiring to help implement the directives of the Synod on such burning issues as reconciliation, justice and peace, I express my trust that "theologians will continue to probe the depths of the trinitarian mystery and its meaning for everyday African life."

The two popes hurl a challenge to the theologians of the Faculty of Theology at CUEA including its Constituent Colleges and to other theologians in the AMECEA Region.

In discussing the implementation of the Second African Synod Ghanaian Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, emphasizes the "inseparable" link between the First African Synod (1994) and the Second African Synod (2009) stating:

For it is in its theological content and character as family of God that the church-family becomes an image of, and a foreshadowing of, the kingdom of God on earth and in history, animating the African society and the world with values of the kingdom of God, namely, reconciliation, justice, truth and peace.⁶¹⁷

In the context of African SCCs being a communion of families within the Church as Family of God, Eritrean Bishop Menghhesteab Tesfamariam, MCCJ, Eparch of Asmara, Eritrea's contemporary challenge can be summarized in these words:

See Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996 and Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997, pp. 123-128.

⁶¹⁷ Peter Turkson, "The Second Synod of Bishops for Africa – a New Pentecost for the Church in Africa," Maputo, Mozambique, 24 May 2010 as quoted in Peter Henriot, "A Balancing Act: Facing the Challenge of Implementing the Directions of the Second African Synod," in Orobator (ed.), *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, p. 243.

If we want to shape the destiny of our societies in the AMECEA Region it is vital that we give the Christian family the utmost priority. Are they truly African and truly Christian? We need to rediscover and revive the Rights of the Family. In the Post Synodal Exhortation of St. John Paul II *The Family in the Modern World* the Christian family is presented in its three main functions as evangelizer, worshiper and servant. We in the AMECEA Region are called to help the family become what it is supposed to be and to fulfill its vocation.⁶¹⁸

We have made a good start in the books and articles that we have written in the past 15 years. In pointing out that the attitude toward SCCs in Eastern Africa appears more positive than it is elsewhere on the continent, Orobator states:

The 1994 [First] African Synod made a decisive option for the formation and development of SCCs as the privileged means for actualizing the model of church as family. Presently a significant number of African theologians laud the rapid implantation and growth of SCCs, which they judge as the active embodiment and tangible manifestation of “a new way of being Local Church.”⁶¹⁹

Waliggo adds:

The [African] bishops could have chosen the Vatican II concept of

⁶¹⁸ Menghhesteab Tesfamariam, “The Role of the Church,” *New People*, No. 135, November-December, 2011, p. 13.

⁶¹⁹ A. E. Orobator, *The Church as Family*, p. 24.

church as Communion or as People of God. They purposely chose Church as Family; they wanted to use the African family as the model for being and living church. The family model includes everyone, baptized and non-baptized, involving every member. It serves well the emphasis on Small Christian Communities.⁶²⁰

The theme of the 1998 Fourth Interdisciplinary Theological Session at CUEA was *The Model of Church as Family: Meeting the African Challenge*. In his paper on how the 1994 First African Synod stressed the formation of genuine SCCs Ugandan liturgist Father David Kyeyune (who died in 2011) states:

Liturgy therefore activates their [the SCC members] Trinitarian and ecclesial relationship, talents and services of the kingdom. The purpose is to enable a Small Christian Community to become an ecclesial community of the Trinity through self-evangelization. It should then be empowered to carry out a mission of liberation in all the dimensions of human life.⁶²¹

The theme of the 2009 Eleventh Interdisciplinary Theological Session at CUEA was *The Faculty of Theology of CUEA Celebrating the Jubilee of St. Paul: Apostle, Missionary and Martyr*. In his paper on “The Jubilee of St. Paul, the Missionary Animator and Father of Small Christian Communities” Mondo asked: “What can we imitate from St. Paul’s missionary methodology for the African Church today?”⁶²² St. Paul shifted his missionary operation center from synagogues to families making them the true milieus of solidarity (Domestic Churches or House Churches), open to other Domestic Churches.

Paul founded the first Small Christian Communities as House Churches⁶²³ that met in private homes. In these early years of Christianity, these small communities were the basic units of Christianity -- before the beginnings of parish structures. See the many examples of House Churches in *Acts of the Apostles, Romans, I Corinthians, Colossians, Ephesians* and *Philippians*. *Acts of the Apostles* 2:46 describes a twofold dynamic: The early Christians

⁶²⁰ John Mary Waliggo, "The Church as Family of God and Small Christian Communities," *AMECEA Documentation Service*, No. 429 (1 December, 1994), p. 1

⁶²¹ David Kyeyune, “The Small Christian Community in the Church as Family” in *The Model of Church as Family: Meeting the African Challenge*, Fourth Interdisciplinary Theological Session at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi: CUEA Publications, 1999, p. 5

⁶²²Paulino Mondo, “The Jubilee of St. Paul, the Missionary Animator and Father of Small Christian Communities,” in *The Faculty of Theology of CUEA Celebrating the Jubilee of St. Paul: Apostle, Missionary and Martyr*, 11th Interdisciplinary Theological Session at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi: Unpublished paper, 2009, p. 1.

⁶²³ The Dura-Europos church (also known as the Dura-Europos house church) is the earliest identified Christian [house church](#). It is located in Dura-Europos in Syria. It is one of the earliest known Christian churches, and was apparently a normal domestic house converted for worship some time between 233 and 256, when the town was abandoned after conquest by the Persians. One can ask: “Is it too much of a stretch to imagine Dura-Europos as the site of the world’s first Small Christian Community?”

continued to pray in the synagogues in the Jewish tradition. “Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.” But the Eucharist was celebrated in the homes in extended families. “They broke bread⁶²⁴ in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts.”

Paul writes to the Romans: “You and I may be mutually encouraged by one another’s faith, yours and mine” (*Romans* 1:12). In our contemporary world we need friends in faith to grow closer to Jesus Christ. We are called in participate in Small Faith-sharing Communities.

English theologian Father Diarmuid O’Murchu, MSH, states:

I wish to propose that a revitalization of Eucharist needs to start where it originally began, namely in the home, or in small household groups gathering around a common vision or enterprise (House Churches, or Basic Christian Communities). In these informal and friendly groups experimentation and exploration can, and should, be normative. And in that context, the use of Eucharistic Prayers such as those I provide seems a very adult and responsible thing to do.⁶²⁵

A concrete example is *Romans* 16:3-5: “Greet Prisca [the diminutive is Priscilla or “Little Prisca”] and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.⁶²⁶ Greet also the church in their house.”

Prisca and Aquila were Jewish Christians who were co-workers with the Apostle Paul. They lived, worked, and traveled with Paul. They were tent makers who because of the persecution of Christians lived in Corinth, Ephesus and Rome at different times in the *New Testament*. They welcomed Paul to live with them and join their tentmaking trade. In all three cities their homes became House Churches, the place where Christians gathered for prayer and the eucharist in the first three centuries. Paul preached in their homes.⁶²⁷

⁶²⁴ “To break bread” is a common reference to the Eucharist. Also popular is the expression “to bread open the Word of God” that refers to reading, reflecting on and interpreting the *Bible*.

⁶²⁵ Diarmuid O’Murchu, “Eucharistic Prayers: “Eucharist in turmoil,” Diarmuid Website, retrieved on 4 October, 2016, <http://www.diarmuid13.com/eucharistic-prayers>

⁶²⁶ “Gentiles” and “pagans” are words used in the *New Testament* (both actual text and commentary) to refer to all those people who were not Jews. These words are not politically correct today and so are normally avoided except when trying to make a specific point.

⁶²⁷ An interesting historical novel is *Paul – A Novel* by Walter Wangerin (Oxford: Lion, 2000). It is set in different cities/towns of Paul’s missionary journeys (chronologically): Corinth, Damascus, Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, Jerusalem and Rome. The 99 short chapters uses the creative literary device of first person narrative where Paul’s story is told through the eyes and experiences of Prisca, James, Annaeus Seneca, Barnabas, Timothy and Luke. House Churches are mentioned frequently in the novel especially those of Prisca and Aquila. Prisca has a particularly large role in the novel.

Indian theologian Father Felix Wilfred points out:

Whenever we read about “houses” as meeting places in records of early Christianity, this does not mean primarily buildings but *families*. In his letters Paul mentions these families several times as meeting places of Local Churches. These experiences of Jesus’ followers manifested themselves in the form of House Churches. They were small fellowships which represented a new set of values.⁶²⁸

These communities were self-ministering. They were missionary by their very nature. These SCCs were family-based evangelizing communities. This is the “Pauline method of founding Small Christian Communities with the responsibility of evangelizing their regions.”⁶²⁹ During the “Year of St. Paul” in 2008-2009 SCCs in Africa especially tried to follow St. Paul’s missionary spirit and ministry. For example, Dar es Salaam Archdiocese had a full weekly program of reading the Letters of St. Paul in the SCCs starting with Paul’s Letter to the *Romans* (beginning on 23 November, 2008) through Paul’s Letter to *Philemon* ending on 29 June, 2009).⁶³⁰

In another place Mondo comments on Luke’s account in *Acts of the Apostles* of the itinerant ministries of Paul and Barnabas in Asia Minor:

If the earliest generations of believers in Jesus had enlisted the services of a cartographer to map out Paul and Barnabas’ numerous foundations, the result would have been a network of Small Christian Communities spread throughout the then known world. Small, interconnected communities have been integral to the faith experience of Jews and Christians for centuries... When Jesus came upon the scene, he also fostered the small community experience. He gathered a small group of twelve to travel with him, to share prayer, ministry, faith and values. He promised his followers that wherever a Small Christian Community of two or three would gather in his name, he would be present among them. After his death and resurrection, Jesus’ disciples missioned forth to establish Small Christian Communities wherever they found a welcome...[In Eastern Africa] we have been wise in returning to our 1st Century roots by establishing believers that are a network of Small Christian Communities, bound together in prayer, faith, mutual support, service, missionary” outreach and accountability. In a world increasingly suspicious of grandiose institutions and “trickle down collegiality,” the Small

⁶²⁸ Felix Wilfred, “Why Basic Ecclesial Communities” in Krämer, Klaus and Vellguth, Klaus (eds.), *Small Christian Communities: Fresh Stimulus*, pp. 20-21. This essay has many insights into the nature and activities of these House Churches.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁶³⁰ See *Mwongozo – Jubilei ya Mwaka wa Paulo 2008/2009*, Jimbo Kuu la Dar es Salaam, Dar es Salaam: Privately Printed, 2008, p. 16.

Christian Community would appear to be an apt and viable model to emulate.⁶³¹

Many SCCs in Eastern Africa follow this House Church⁶³² model. American volunteer missionary Vicki Smith describes accompanying the assistant parish priest in Kowak Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania as he celebrates the Eucharist on a rotational basis for perhaps 20 SCC members in a particular family home in a SCC. She says, "These are House Churches."⁶³³ A mass in a home (a Home Mass or a House Mass) anywhere in the world can be called a type of House Church.⁶³⁴

⁶³¹ Paulino Mondo, Homily for the Fifth Sunday of Easter Year C on the theme of "The Great Motivator," Email File Attachment retrieved on 18 April, 2013.

⁶³² The rich variety of Houses Churches, especially from the Evangelical Christian perspective, is seen in this comment:

Most likely you don't use the term "house church" to describe your small group [in the USA]. After all, don't house churches meet "over there," in places like China, India, and Ethiopia where Christians are persecuted? The reality, however, is that the house church movement is [alive and well](#) in America. Researchers have estimated that there are 20 million people meeting in house churches in America and [Barna](#) predicts that alternative movements [and alternative faith communities] like house churches might reach 30-35 percent of all Christians by 2025. Yet, many more small groups exist in the U.S. with some [estimating](#) that 75 million adult Americans regularly attend the estimated three million small groups.

What are the differences between House Churches and small groups? What might small groups have to learn from modern-day House Churches? Houses Churches see themselves as fully the church, quite apart from the Sunday gathering. The leaders are elders or pastors, not facilitators developed in the Local Church. House Churches derive their meaning squarely from the *New Testament* Church, not by any modern small-group model. Small groups, on the other hand, are not independent, but part of a Local Church. Leaders are prepared and coached through the Local Church and the small groups gather together each week for corporate worship. Though there are some key differences, small groups can learn a lot from House Churches.

Joel Comiskey, "Four Things Small Groups Can Learn from House Churches," SmallGroups.com Website, retrieved 14 October, 2015, http://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2015/four-things-small-groups-can-learn-from-house-churches.html?utm_source=buildingsmallgroups-html&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=9077722&utm_content=389162233&utm_campaign=2013

⁶³³ Vicki Smith in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 18 September, 2013.

⁶³⁴ The satisfaction level of those attending House Churches or House Groups tends to be higher than their counterparts who attend traditional churches. Surveys have shown that satisfaction levels are elevated in regard to church leadership, faith commitment of members,

So far 21 B.A., M.A. and Ph. D. Theses have been written at CUEA on SCCs and more are in process.⁶³⁵ Four M.A. Theses on SCCs have been written in the School of Theology at Tangaza University College. In April, 2015 Kenyan layman Paul Njuki finished a M.A Thesis on *Inadequacy of Faith-based Communities as Social Actors for Social Transformation: Case Study in Kawangware Division, Nairobi County* in the Institute of Social Ministry (ISM). Kenyan diocesan priest Father Paul Mungathia wrote his thesis on a similar topic in the Institute of Social Ministry (ISM). This reflects the current interest in the involvement of SCCs in justice and peace.

There is also an increasing interest in Youth SCCs for example, Spe's 2004 long essay on the "Impact of Small Christian Communities on Youth: A Qualitative Case Study in Our Lady Consolata Catholic Church, Riara Ridge" in the Institute of Youth Studies (IYS), Tangaza, University College.

Small Christian Communities embody the values of inclusiveness, sharing, unity and solidarity that form the contemporary Family of God. Our models are: First, the "first small community" (the Trinity -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit). God is in a community of three persons in one—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—who exist in perfect unity. So it is not surprising that from the beginning, God created us to be in community with one another. *Genesis 2:18* states: "It is not good for a person to be alone." This passage is often used in the context of marriage, but it also speaks to our fundamental need to connect with others in the human community. Community is deeply grounded in the nature of God. It flows from who God is. Because God is community, God creates community. It is God's gift to humans. Therefore, the making of community may not be regarded as an optional decision for Christians. It is a compelling and irrevocable necessity, a binding divine mandate for all believers at all times. Adapted from *Why Small Groups? The Reason Behind Intentional Christian Community* by Carolyn Taketa, Small Groups Website, retrieved on 21 April, 2016, http://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2012/why-small-groups.html?utm_source=buildingsmallgroups-html&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=9077722&utm_content=431367207&utm_campaign=email

Richard Currier and Francis Gram begin the first chapter of their book *Forming Small Christian Communities: A Personal Journey* with these words: "It is surprising how much we can learn about Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the first chapter of Genesis, the first

level of community within the church and spiritual depth of the church setting. Research has shown that older members are drawn to House Churches because they are devout Christians who desire deeper, more intense relationships with God and other church members. Younger members who are drawn to House Churches are those who are interested in faith and spirituality but not traditional forms of church.

⁶³⁵ The two latest theses are Peter Mbugua, *Social Differences in Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Challenge for Deeper Evangelization in Nairobi-West Deanery*, Nairobi: Unpublished Master's Thesis, CUEA, 2012. Vincent Mwakhwawa, *Improving Participation of the Laity in Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Challenge in the Archdiocese of Lilongwe*, Nairobi: Unpublished Master's Thesis, CUEA, 2012.

book of the Bible.”⁶³⁶ There is no doubt that this statement refers to the friendship that existed between God the creator and the creatures, Adam and Eve, a community of love and caring for one another, since the writer tells us how God used to take a stroll with Adam in the garden in the evenings (cf. Genesis 3:8). From this source of the first community including God and humans, originated the aspect of communion which runs throughout the scriptures, showing the relationship between God and His people, the chosen race (cf. *Genesis 17:1-11; Exodus 12; 20:2-11*), as well as a relationship between the people themselves (cf. *Genesis 4:1-16; Exodus 20:12-17*).

Second, the “first Small Christian Community” (the Holy Family – Jesus, Joseph and Mary).⁶³⁷

Magesa boldly states: "Ecclesiologically they (SCCs) are the best thing that has happened since the *New Testament*."⁶³⁸

We can reflect more deeply on the life and experiences of the first SCCs in the *Acts of the Apostles* especially Chapters 2: 42-45 and 4: 32-35⁶³⁹ and the implications for Africa

⁶³⁶ R. Currier and F. Gram, *Forming a Small Christian Community: A Personal Journey*, Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1992, p. 5.

⁶³⁷ Technically the Holy Family may not have been a “Christian” Community, but was the prefiguration of the first one.

⁶³⁸ Laurenti Magesa in a private letter to the author, July, 1983.

⁶³⁹ This is an ideal portrait of the life of the first SCCs. History reveals many experiments to imitate directly or indirectly these SCCs in a community or communitarian lifestyle (and in terms of general human society, an alternative lifestyle). A popular style is the commune that is normally a large (and sometimes small) gathering of people sharing a common life. It is an intentional community of people living together, sharing common interests, property, possessions, resources, and, in some communes, work (originally agricultural) and income. In addition to the communal economy, consensus decision-making, non-hierarchical structures and ecological living have become important core principles for many communes. Some examples:

1. The Hutterites, named for their founder Jakob Hutter, live in a Christian "community of goods" and practice absolute pacifism that has resulted in hundreds of years of diaspora to many countries.
2. Religious institutions such as abbeys and monasteries.
3. Kibbutz (plural is kibbutzim) in Israel is an example of officially organized communes. [Wikipedia](#)'s description: “A kibbutz is a collective community in Israel that was traditionally based on agriculture. The first kibbutz, established in 1909, was Degania. Today, farming has been partly supplanted by other economic branches, including industrial plants and high-tech enterprises.”
4. A popular style that does not have a specific religious affiliation is young musicians living in a shared community in Amsterdam.
5. There are many small justice and peace groups that live a community or communitarian lifestyle.
6. Catholic Charismatic Movement.

today. These two core Scripture passages are very popular in SCCs workshops and courses along with Jesus' promise in *Matthew* 18:20: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Let us look more closely at these two passages in *Acts of the Apostles*.

Chapter 2:42-45:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

The five pillars of these activities:

1. Teaching of the apostles.
2. Fellowship⁶⁴⁰/Communal life.
3. Breaking of bread: celebrating the Eucharist in the homes (House Churches or House Communities⁶⁴¹).
4. Prayers.
5. Help the needy.

Chapter 4: 32-35:

The whole community of believers was one in heart and mind (of one heart and mind). None of them would say, "This is mine!" about any of their possessions, but held everything in common. The apostles continued to bear powerful witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and an abundance of grace was at work among them all. There were no needy persons among them. Those who owned properties or houses would sell them, bring the proceeds from the sales, and place them in the care and under the authority of the apostles. Then it was distributed to anyone who was in need.

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7. Some Intentional Christian Communities.
 8. The communal religious life described in Rod Dreher's book *The Benedict Option*.

⁶⁴⁰ A difficult word to express in gender neutral or gender free, non-sexist language.

⁶⁴¹ English laywoman Jacqueline points out: "There is a need to remember that in the very early church it was the community rather than the Eucharist that was the Body of Christ. The emphasis shifted as Roman models of power took hold. It follows, as the early Christians understood, that there is a place for house communities to assemble and to do as Jesus did at the Last Supper. *Tablet*, Vol. 271, No. 9202 (27 May, 2017), p. 18. *Tablet* Website, retrieved on 15 June, 2017, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/downloadpdf/270517issue.pdf>

The description of their life:

1. One in heart and mind (of one heart and mind).
2. Shared everything they had.
3. Testified to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.
4. Distributed money to anyone who had need.

Mukenge says that another biblical foundation of SCCs is the community of disciples after the Passion, Death and Resurrection of Christ especially the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (*Luke 24:12-35*). The Emmaus story is a model for spiritual formation, catechesis and evangelization in Africa today.⁶⁴² Jesus is first the Listener and then the Teacher. So with our leaders in the Catholic Church. First, the Listening Church and second, the Teaching Church. This is stressed by Pope Francis.

We need to begin from our local context. It emphasizes the importance of, even more the necessity of, contextualization. Jesus began the proclamation of the Good News of his resurrection from the situation of the hopelessness of the two disciples. All our preaching and teaching has to take into account the concrete situations of the daily lives of the African people: urban or rural, poor or rich, Sunday Catholic or daily communicant. Like Jesus on the road, after listening modern day pastoral workers and evangelizers need to speak to the African peoples' questions, concerns, needs and desires. This includes addressing the burning questions of the struggle for survival, corruption, tribalism (negative ethnicity), realistic marriage laws and the inculturation of the liturgy. As Magesa states:

The first stage in proclamation, therefore, must be to identify the concrete situation of the lives of the people so that, in the light of the Scriptures and especially of the Good News of Jesus, they may come to recognize the life-giving presence of God even in situations that seem hopeless, as the two travelers to Emmaus did.⁶⁴³

Mukenge compares the life and activities of African SCCs to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus with the key common denominator being the active presence and power of the Risen Christ.

In order to underscore the significance of the experience of Jesus Christ's presence I suggest, as a paradigm, the account of the disciples on the way to Emmaus, which, to my mind, outlines the path of faith, emphasizing

⁶⁴² The Emmaus story and SCCs in Eastern Africa are intertwined with 36 references in this Ebook.

⁶⁴³ Laurenti Magesa, "*Redemptoris Missio, Centesimus Annus* and the African Synod," *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, 33, 6 (December, 1991): 332. I am indebted to American Maryknoll missionary priest Father Kenneth Thesing, MM for the challenging phrase "preaching the Good News in bad new situations in Africa."

both its demands and the necessity to join a religious community in order to bear witness.⁶⁴⁴

First, he contrasts the community of disciples in the Upper Room in Jerusalem that the two disciples going to Emmaus leave with their natural community in the village of Emmaus that they return to stating:

Their return to Emmaus can be compared to a retreat to seclusion because expectations were not met and yearning left unsatisfied. African Christians [and by extension SCC members] confronted with existential problems employ a similar tactic, returning to traditional “solutions:” *Church in the morning, fetish priest in the evening* – similar to any other believer who, overwhelmed by events, fails to see salvation in the Gospel of Christ, which is a Gospel of the cross, service and love.⁶⁴⁵

Mukenge described how the two disciples are changed and transformed. First, they are galvanized by the contemplation of the Word of God especially as the stranger explains all the Scripture passages concerning Jesus Christ. Second, they recognize Jesus’ presence during the communal meal, the place of communion and sharing. Third, they are inspired and energized to return to Jerusalem to rejoin the small community of the apostles in the Upper Room in order to bear witness. He adds:

The paradigm of the disciples from Emmaus, who travel as pilgrims, remind us that the creation of [basic] ecclesial communities constitutes an ongoing task, and that the Spirit abiding within their members leads the latter on new and unforeseen paths in order to open their eyes to the challenges denoted by brotherhood [and sisterhood,] solidarity and sharing.⁶⁴⁶

We see empowerment at work here in different ways. The two disciples, and by analogy we SCC members, are empowered by the Risen Christ and his Spirit through Scripture, the Eucharist and the ongoing openness to the Holy Spirit’s activity in our lives. We are also empowered through accompaniment: walking together, sharing together, working together and evangelizing/ministering together gives strength and mutual support. A Burkina Faso proverb says, *If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk with others.*

Pope Francis refers to the icon of Emmaus as a key for interpreting the role of the Catholic Church in the present and the future. Can the SCCs model be the kind of church he describes?

Today, we need a church capable of walking at people’s side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a church which accompanies them on their journey; a church able to make sense of the “night” contained in the flight of

⁶⁴⁴ André Kabasele Mukenge, “The Biblical Approach,” p. 6.

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid*, pp. 6-7.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p. 13.

so many of our brothers and sisters from Jerusalem; a church which realizes that the reasons why people leave also contain reasons why they can eventually return. But we need to know how to interpret, with courage, the larger picture. Are we still a church capable of warming hearts? A church capable of leading people back to Jerusalem? Of bringing them home?⁶⁴⁷

Mukenge makes the further distinction:

A Christian community is fundamentally determined by the experience of the presence of Jesus Christ. Is this not reminiscent of the words attributed to Jesus himself: "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (*Matthew* 18:20)? Viewed in this light, a Basic *Ecclesial* Community differs from any other neighborhood organization, a club of friends or an association insofar as it is founded on the presence of Jesus Christ in its midst. It is aware of this presence and endeavors to make it tangible. In other words, a Basic *Ecclesial* Community *convenes in the name of Christ*. Cf. *1 Corinthians* 3:11: "For nobody can lay down any other foundation than the one which is there already, namely Jesus Christ."⁶⁴⁸

So a key to the identity and ministry of our SCCs in Eastern Africa is the conscious presence and power of the Risen Christ.

When I am asked what I feel is the single most important verse in the *Bible* I answer: the "burning" question in *Luke* 24:26. "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" This passage goes on to quote Jesus saying to the apostles in the Upper Room: "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day, and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things." (*Luke* 24: 46-48). SCC members are witnesses to the suffering, death⁶⁴⁹ and resurrection of Jesus Christ – first as it was lived 2,000 ago and today as it is lived in our contemporary world.

Thus this story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus can be ever new in its interpretations and ever new in its applications. We can look at the ups and downs of our daily lives (see the opening words of *Gaudium et Spes*) through the lens of this *Bible* passage. For example, a member of St. Jude Thaddeus SCC in Musoma, Tanzania said that while St. Jude is not specifically named in this gospel account in the Upper Room, he was present in all these post-resurrection events. His involvement can bring something new to the retelling of these *Bible* stories. As an eye-witness of the resurrection and the Risen Christ, St. Jude inspires contemporary SCCs and their faith life especially those SCCs for whom he is the

⁶⁴⁷ Francis, "Francis' Address to Bishops [of Brazil]," 27 July, 2013, in an email message from the *Zenit Daily Dispatch*, 27 July, 2013.

⁶⁴⁸ André Kabasele Mukenge, "The Biblical Approach," p. 6.

⁶⁴⁹ From 1984-85 I was Pastor of Kiagata Parish, Musoma Diocese, Tanzania. Three Filipino lay missionaries were part of the pastoral team. When I asked them when did the Basic Christian Communities in the Philippines become strong, they answered: "When we were persecuted and has to suffer, and even to die, for our faith."

Patron Saint. SCCs members can also ask for St. Jude's special intercession because he is the Saint of Lost Causes.

Faith stories such as the Emmaus story can be retold in new ways especially using an African setting and context. All these African versions can lead to constructing a type of local narrative theology of inculturation.⁶⁵⁰ These are Africa's fifth gospels. One example is *The Parable of the Two Young Men on the Road to Nakuru*. Tanzanian layman Emmanuel Chacha created a Swahili version of this story called *The Parable of the Two Youth Going to Majita* (a village thirty-seven miles from Musoma).

Another creative example is *The Parable of on the Way to Bauleni* by Renato Kizito Sesana.⁶⁵¹

After the end of the 1994 African Synod two Zambian bishops return to Lusaka from Rome. In the story they become the two disciples returning to Emmaus. The two bishops are tired, disappointed, disillusioned, and even depressed about their month of hard work in Rome and the uncertain results. They are helped by a taxi cab driver named Mtonga who takes them to a meeting of a Small Christian Community in an area known as Bauleni, an estate established by squatters. A young woman with a two-week-old baby named "Sinodi," a young man with the dreams of youth, and an elderly refugee speak with the bishops. The bishops listen, their hearts moved. Why were they bored while listening to the solemn speeches given in the Vatican hall during the synod? Instead the simple language of their people set their hearts on fire. Their tiredness is gone. They feel more and more at home. Mtonga and the SCC members together as a community are the Jesus figure in the story. These lay Christians together minister to the two bishops and give them new hope. At the end of the SCC meeting the younger bishop says: "They have proclaimed the Resurrected Lord to us."⁶⁵²

⁶⁵⁰ Another dimension of narrative theology is seen in Catherine Hilbert's comments on the preaching of Jesus in the Emmaus Narrative: "This initial analysis of the Emmaus story in light of [Paul] Ricoeur's theory of narrative suggests that effective narrative preaching involves the threefold pattern of prefiguration of past human experience, configuration of the human story in light of the divine plot of the story of Jesus, and refiguration of imagination and life through the ongoing process of conversion. "Retelling the Gospel Story," *Eglise et Theologie*, 21 (1990), p. 153.

⁶⁵¹ These and other similar stories can be found in the section on "Retelling the Emmaus Story in Africa Today" in Joseph Healey, and Donald Sybertz (eds.), *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996 and Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997, pp. 261-266. Available as an Ebook on Amazon (for Kindle), Google and Barnes and Noble (for Nook).

⁶⁵² Renato Kizito Sesana, "The Parable of On the Way to Bauleni," *New People Feature Service*, 26 (May 1, 1994), pp. 1-3. *African Stories for Preachers and Teachers*, Paulines Publications Africa, 2005), p. 20. Also African Story No. 453 in the "African Stories Database," African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved on 2 May, 2014, [http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=174](http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid[0]=174)

The prayer, reflection and discussion of African SCC members can also be enriched and stimulated by African artistic depictions of the biblical story of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus” in creative African paintings, carvings, stories, poems, plays, songs, liturgies, homilies and liturgical symbols.⁶⁵³ Most of these artistic creations present a unique interpretation and application of this famous *Bible* story.

One specific example is the triptych (three panels or scenes) of the “Two Disciples on the Road to Emmaus “on the front wall of the chapel of the Emmaus Spirituality Center in Lusaka, Zambia painted by *Zambian* artists coordinated by a Poor Clare Sister. The left scene is Jesus meeting the two disciples in the road. A unique feature is that Jesus is pointing to the sky where an image of the cross or crucifix appears. The larger, middle scene immediately behind the altar is the breaking of the bread. The right scene is the two disciples joyfully returning to Jerusalem.

The reflection process in the story of the “Two Disciples on the Road to Emmaus” can be compared to other reflection methods that start with our daily experience and can be used in the SCCs Model of Church such as:

Emmaus Walk

See, Discern, Act

Pastoral Theological Reflection (PTR)

Review of Life

“Consciousness Examen”

George Aschenbrenner, S.J., is well-known as the author of a seminal article on the “Consciousness Examen” which transformed the way we approach this fundamental Ignatian exercise, moving from a moralistic appraisal to a growing awareness of how God is active in one’s life and how one is responding to that divine action.

"God-incidence" rather than a “coincidence”... **ADD**

Catholics reflecting on their personal experience such as Kathleen Kollman Birch’s “Christ’s Presence Illumines Sorrows and Joys” in the *Houston Catholic Worker*. Kathleen Kollman Birch lived and worked with refugee and immigrant women at the Catholic Worker house in Houston, Texas in the summer of 2015. Her late evening reflection in the chapel in Houston is “almost perfect.” I use it in both SCCs Workshops and Writing Workshops. She has a gift of writing eloquently and honestly on her own personal experience. Before going

⁶⁵³ Examples from Cameroon, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia can be found in the section on “Retelling the Emmaus story in Africa Today” in Joseph Healey, and Donald Sybertz (eds.), *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996 and Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997, pp. 261-266. Available as an Ebook on Amazon (for Kindle), Google and Barnes and Noble (for Nook).

into quiet contemplative prayer when she empties her mind of thoughts, she knows that she has to “sift through the memories” of the day and discover how God wants her to see them.

Another important *Bible* passage on community is *Ecclesiastes* 4:9-12:

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.

In these passages we find the biblical foundations of SCCs. Since SCCs are rooted especially in the *New Testament*, participants in our SCCs workshops and courses are reminded of the saying: “Small Christian Communities are a new way of being church that is really a very old (2,000 years old!) way of being church.” Magesa “thinks outside of the box” when he says:

From its inception as a community after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, this is what the church in the New Testament was – “the community of believers was of one heart and mind,” (*Acts of the Apostles* 4:32) leading them to share everything they had. To say, then, that SCCs constitute a, or the, “new way of being church” is a serious mischaracterization. More correctly, in SCCs, with the help of the Holy Spirit, the African church is pioneering in the rediscovery of the *original manner of being church*.⁶⁵⁴

I was vividly reminded of this “living history” when I visited the city of Philippi, an eastern Macedonia town that was a Roman colony and an early center of Christianity in Greece, during the “Year of St. Paul” in 2009. I stood in the middle of the excavation of one of the House Churches (also called a Small Domestic Church) that is the predecessor of SCCs on the site of the business woman Lydia’s house. *Acts of the Apostles* 16: 14-15 recounts how Lydia and her household were baptized and offered hospitality to the traveling preachers such as St. Paul and Silas (“come and stay at my home/house”). Lydia’s house became the site for the Local Church in Philippi, with her as its host and perhaps leader.

Our African SCCs are a communion of families that are the fundamental cell of society, the main cell of society and the basic social unit of society. They are often called

⁶⁵⁴ Laurenti Magesa, “The Joy of Community,” p. 24.

Domestic Churches.⁶⁵⁵ Pengo calls “the family the smallest Christian Community.”⁶⁵⁶ We are invited to imitate the life of the Trinity that is a life of sharing. Mwoleka was one of the first persons to see sharing in the Trinity as a model for sharing in SCCs:

I think we have difficulties in understanding the Holy Trinity because we approach the mystery from the wrong side.⁶⁵⁷ The intellectual side is not the best side to start with. The right approach to the mystery is to imitate the life of the Trinity...I am dedicated to the ideal of *Ujamaa* (Swahili for "Familyhood") because it invites all people, in a down-to-earth practical way, to imitate the life of the Trinity which is a life of sharing.⁶⁵⁸

Using an inductive approach to the mystery of the Trinity, Africans start with concrete examples of sharing life in all its aspects. These human and cultural analogies are mirrored in African proverbs and sayings: the bonding of the mother and child who are like the umbilical cord and strap in which the cord is wrapped; the husband and wife who are as close as ring and finger; and close friends who are like the small cowry shell and its pouch that do not separate.

Small Christian Communities try to live intensely the trinitarian life of mutual love, cooperation, participation and reaching out to others in loving service. This experiential

⁶⁵⁵ This is a very different model than SCCs in Europe and North America that are mainly composed of individuals (often living in different geographical locations) rather than members of families living together. It is felt that African’s model of family-based SCCs can give a positive message and influence to Western society that is witnessing the breakdown of family structures. For a Case Study of the African model see Cieslikiewicz, “Pastoral Involvement,” pp. 100-101.

⁶⁵⁶ Polycarp Pengo, “The Church in Africa Regarding its Mission and Challenges,” Paper at the Inauguration Ceremony of the Research Area for Interdisciplinary Studies Related to African Culture at the Pontifical Lateran University, 6 December, 2011, in an email message from the *Zenit Daily Dispatch*, 6 December, 2011.

⁶⁵⁷ In SCCs Workshops on the local level Mwoleka would hold up a stick and say: Let us suppose this stick is the Trinity. To understand it better let us look at the practical end of the stick, not at the theoretical end (that is “the wrong end of the stick”). And the practical end is a life of sharing. The three members of the Holy Trinity share their life together. And we human beings are invited to imitate this Trinitarian life, to share in this Trinitarian life. This is the meaning of life in SCCs.

In a similar vein Pope Francis says that “The Trinity is not just a mystery to adore, but a model for how to interact in all our relationships from friends to family to coworkers.” So SCCs is all about relationships.

⁶⁵⁸ Mwoleka and Healey, eds., *Ujamaa and Christian Communities*, p. 15. Unfortunately *Ujamaa* was critiqued and criticised mainly for its flawed economic policy. As the word and principles went out of fashion/style, some of the community values were lost or submerged.

approach can lead to a better understanding of the sharing among the Persons of the Trinity, for example, the intimate union of God the Father and God the Son: "The Father and I are one" (*John* 10:30). "The Father is in me and I am in the Father" (*John* 10:38).

When Pope Benedict XVI asks "theologians to continue to probe the depths of the trinitarian mystery and its meaning for everyday African life"⁶⁵⁹ we can reflect on the Trinity as the first "Small Community" (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) and imitate the Trinitarian life and union in our own African SCCs on the grassroots level. A special richness and depth are found in an Eastern African adaptation of the prayer *Glory Be to the Father* based on African names for God:

"Glory be to the Father, the Creator and Source,
To the Nursing Mother,⁶⁶⁰
To Jesus, the Great Healer and Eldest Brother/Chief Intercessor
And to the Unsurpassed Great Spirit. Amen."⁶⁶¹

In this Church as Family of God Model of Church along with parish-based SCCs and Lectionary-based SCCs we can talk of family-based SCCs.⁶⁶² These include SCCs that incorporate youth and children into the activities of the small community and "Mother SCCs" that have branches of Youth SCCs (sometimes divided into Junior Youth and Senior Youth Groups)⁶⁶³ and Children SCCs.⁶⁶⁴ There are a variety of other SCCs that go by names such

⁶⁵⁹ Benedict XVI **CHECK**

⁶⁶⁰ See:

a. *Isaiah* 49:15-16: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you. See, I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me."

b. *Isaiah* 66:12-13: "You shall nurse and be carried on her arm, and dandled on her knees.

As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you; you shall be comforted in Jerusalem."

⁶⁶¹ Joseph Healey (compiled), *Once Upon a Time in Africa*, p. 128.

⁶⁶² Described in Simon Rurinjah, "Importance of Small Christian Communities in Our Lives," Nairobi: Unpublished talk in SCCs Classes at Hekima University College and Tangaza University College, 2009, p. 1.

⁶⁶³ The Pontifical Missionary Childhood (PMC) in various parishes in Mombasa Archdiocese and Kitale Diocese use the Lumko Seven Steps Method of Bible Sharing/Gospel Sharing in Children SCCs of 12 members each. The PMC animators are trained first in this method.

⁶⁶⁴ St. Jude Thaddeus Small Christian Community (SCC) in the Musoma, Tanzania meets every Thursday afternoon for the *Bible Service/Bible Reflection*. Sometimes the children form their own Small Reflection Group so they can participate more freely in their own way. A reflection on "The Parable of the Lost Sheep" began with ten children (aged five to 14) closing their eyes, picturing a favorite animal, and then mentioning it to the small group -- a giraffe, sheep, cow, gazelle, lion. Then two young boys (who actually herd their family sheep) described what it is like. This led the group into a discussion on "Jesus as the Good Shepherd" in *John* 10. A visiting priest (a former Scripture professor) participated in this

as Young Adult SCCs, Young Married Couples SCCs,⁶⁶⁵ Married Couples with Young Children SCCs, etc.

There is a lot of discussion about the breakdown of the family structure in our contemporary society in Africa (and more so in western society). There are a large number of single parent homes in urban centers like Nairobi. A 2015 study reveal that single parents in Nairobi are 30%, the vast majority being single mothers living in the slums and economically poorer areas.

The husband/father is often a “missing person.” In the absence of men in the slums and informal settlements of many Nairobi parishes single mothers (that has two meanings)⁶⁶⁶ are elected the leaders of their SCCs. So family and family values take on new meaning in new African contexts and situations. Fresh research is needed on what “family” means to contemporary Africans and how family values are shifting. Italian Comboni missionaries priests Mariano Tibaldo, MCCJ and Francesco Pierli, MCCJ state:

The family calls for a model of church that should be more and more communion, solidarity, sharing of ministry and authority. Such an experience of the church that is somehow already present in the SCC will promote the rise of a new model of family beyond and above the traditional extended family and the imported ailing nuclear family of the Western World.⁶⁶⁷

Some SCCs in Africa are countering these current trends by helping couples who cannot receive the Eucharist to regularize their marriages in a Catholic ceremony. Mdawida’s research in Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Nairobi in 2011-2012 shows that many Catholics married in the Catholic Church after joining a SCC.⁶⁶⁸ Other SCCs have night prayers for families in

children’s Small Reflection Group during two different weeks. He was amazed how the children were so comfortable and vocal in talking about the gospel in their small group. Later he said: “I would not have believed this is possible if I had not seen it with my own eyes.” “Seeing It With My Own Eyes” Story No. 362 in the “African Stories Database,” African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 21 September, 2011, [http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=139](http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid[0]=139)

⁶⁶⁵ In an interview with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 14 January, 2015 Kenyan layman Henry Kiranga emphasized the importance of specific SCCs for newly married couples. He said that after finishing school and getting married, a lot of Catholic young people drift away from the church and seem to disappear. They do not feel at home in the Adult SCCs. Their parents and the adults have other interests and discuss other topics. The solution is specific Young Married Couples SCCs (the same age group or peer group) where they can discuss and focus on their own issues and concerns.

⁶⁶⁶ What percentage of these women were married, but their husbands died, left them or were thrown out of the home? What percentage of these women decided to have children and raise them without a husband?

⁶⁶⁷ Mariano Tibaldo and Francesco Pierli, “Two Extremes: The Pastoralists and Slums Experiences of the Family” in *Theology of the Church as Family of God*, Nairobi; Paulines Publications Africa, 1997, p. 64.

the neighborhood and a carefully planned program of catechesis for younger members such as teaching the sacraments as a regular part of SCC meetings.

African SCCs emphasize personal relationships, family bonds, solidarity, and Christian belonging --sharing together, working together, and celebrating together (including meals and entertainment) in the context of African values and customs. Thus SCCs are a concrete expression of, and realization of, the Church as Family of God Model of Church in Africa. We need to explore further the inculturation of this family Ecclesiology⁶⁶⁹ in Africa and the implications of communion Ecclesiology in an African context. This includes an African expression of Trinitarian Communion Ecclesiology.

Swiss Fidei Donum priest and historian Father John Baur (who died in 2003) emphasized that SCCs derive from Vatican II's Ecclesiology of the Church as People of God, but are very much a work in process. "It implies that all the faithful fulfill their vocation and mission in the Church, implying a change from the priest-based apostolate to a people based apostolate that demands that the priest assumes the role of a community-minded inspirational minister."⁶⁷⁰ Magesa points out: "If the pastoral implications of this shift have not been practically fully "digested" in many dioceses in Eastern Africa, as anyone with some ministerial experience in the region will know, there has not been any shortage of theological reflection on this rediscovered Ecclesiology of the early church."⁶⁷¹ He goes on to state:

The best contribution of the Ecclesiology of SCCs in Eastern Africa has been to provide a clear theological elaboration of the threefold theological characteristic of these entities. Like any baptized person, each SCC in its members is priestly, prophetic and kingly. As priestly, its life must be based on faith and unceasing prayer to God. As prophetic, it must become an advocate of justice and reconciliation in society. As kingly, it must gather

⁶⁶⁸ Armogast Mdawida, *Comparing Two Models of the Catholic Church: SCC Model of Church and Apostolic Association Model of Church: A Case Study at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Nairobi, Kenya*, Nairobi: Unpublished Master's Thesis, Tangaza University College (CUEA), 2012, p. 69.

⁶⁶⁹ As a sign of the times around the world compare this statement of RENEW International (based in Plainfield, New Jersey, USA)'s prophetic vision for the renewal of the Catholic Church today: "This vision calls the church to become a family of small communities whose shared purpose is to reinvigorate the church and serve the needs of the wider world. RENEW small communities are challenged to explore their own experiences in light of the Gospel and to commit to decisive action to live their faith in the world." Theresa Rickard, "Strategic Planning Assignment: RENEW International," New York: Columbia Business School, Executive Education Institute for Not-for-Profit Management, Unpublished paper, 2 May, 2011, p. 1.

⁶⁷⁰ John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994, pp. 319-320.

⁶⁷¹ Laurenti Magesa, "A Panoramic View of 25 Years of African Theology in East Africa: Foundations, Developments and Prospects" in *Hekima Review*, Vol. 40 (May, 2009), p. 24.

within itself, without undue discrimination, all those who seek refuge in its fold.⁶⁷²

Baur presents the challenge of this prophetic role in describing the growth of SCCs that calls for “public witness to justice and peace, and ecumenical cooperation in development.”⁶⁷³

But how do SCCs contribute to the construction of a local African theology of the Church as Family of God? Some years ago a friend of mine and I had an animated discussion with an East African Bishop about the development of Small Christian Communities. He said that we should not move further in promoting SCCs until we had a “more developed theology of SCCs especially a clearer Ecclesiology.” But we took the view that in very many instances *praxis is prior to theology* and that the theology of SCCs should evolve out of the local people's practical grassroots experience. So we had a basic difference about the starting point. The bishop favored a deductive approach with theology as the starting point. We preferred an inductive approach with the life, experience and reflections of existing SCCs as the starting point.

How is the recent praxis of SCCs in Africa contributing to the development of the theology of the Church as Family of God? Flynn points out: “African cultural relationships and communal life are the foundation that provides a developing model of a Church based on the African family...Small Christian Communities are affirmed as the fundamental building blocks of the Church as Family of God in Africa.”⁶⁷⁴ Stated another way, SCCs are the ideal foundational units of building the Church as Family of God.

Rutechura emphasizes that “hopes for the Church in Africa depend on the courage to foster and build SCCs as the ideal foundational units of building the Church as Family of God.”⁶⁷⁵ The SCC is a communion of families. The outstation or subparish is a communion of SCCs. The parish is a communion of outstations or subparishes. If members of the SCCs meet in the middle of the week for Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection using the Scripture readings of the following Sunday, then the Sunday Eucharist in the parish or subparish or outstation becomes a “communion of communities” ecclesial experience. The parish community also becomes a Eucharistic Community.

If “the Eucharist is the source (*fons*) and summit (*culmen*) of the Christian life” (Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, No. 10 and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*). No. 1324), then fostering eucharistic communities at all levels – from the SCC Mass in the home to the Sunday and weekday Eucharists in the parish church – is vitally important. African relationship and community values enrich the meaning of the Eucharistic

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*

⁶⁷³ Baur, *2000 Years*, Second Edition, 2009, p. 391.

⁶⁷⁴ Kieran Flynn, *Communities for the Kingdom: A Handbook for Small Christian Community Leaders*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, *Spearhead* Nos. 181-182, 2007, pp. 82, 98.

⁶⁷⁵ Pius Rutechura, “From the First to the Second African Synod of Bishops: Hopes and Prospects for the Church in Africa,” in *Hekima Review*, Vol. 38 (2008), p. 14.

community. A Ganda, Uganda proverb says *Relationship is in the eating together* that can be the starting point for a rich eucharistic theology.⁶⁷⁶

A specific pastoral challenge in Africa today is what we call the “Eucharistic Famine”⁶⁷⁷ (also called the “Eucharistic Hunger” or the “Eucharistic Drought”). Due to the lack of priests, on any given Sunday most Catholics in Africa (up to 60%⁶⁷⁸ in some surveys) participate in a “Sunday Service Without a Priest” especially in rural areas where there is usually no Holy Communion rather than participate in a regular mass. This is popularly called “the Eucharistic Famine.” In some of these services communion is distributed by the catechist or by a trained and installed lay leader. In general the AMECEA Bishops do not have the Eucharist reserved in outstation chapels mainly because of security issues and do not allow the catechists to give out communion because of the abuses that have taken place.

So providing the Eucharist to all Catholics in Africa is a great need. Malawian theologian Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, MAfr emphasizes that the Eucharist community is the heart of our Christian life. He says that if Christian communities in Africa cannot receive the Eucharist because of the lack of ordained ministers that presently in the Latin Rite are male, celibate priests, then we must rethink our church laws and pastoral practices, for example, ordain mature married men of proven leadership skills (*virī probati* in Latin). Then many more people would be able to receive communion and our SCCs would truly be Eucharistic Communities.

The retired German Fidei Donum Bishop Fritz Lobinger (formerly of Aliwal Diocese, South Africa) has written extensively in books such as *Like His Brothers and Sisters* (Crossways, Publishing Company, 1999), *Teams of Elders: Moving Beyond “Virī Probati”* (Claretian Publications, 2007), *Every Community Its Own Ordained Leaders* (Claretian Publications, 2008) and *The Empty Altar: An Illustrated Book to Help Talk about the Lack of Parish Priests* (Crossroad Publishing Company, 2016). He states:

"The Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper belong together" must remain our key principle. In about half of all Catholic communities in the world, these two things -- the Lord's Day and the Lord's Supper, which intrinsically belong together, have in fact become separated. Thousands of communities meet on Sunday not for the Eucharist but for a “Service of the Word.” [In fact] more than half of the Catholic Church's communities have no resident priest. This is

⁶⁷⁶ This is a pastoral problem not limited to Africa. Observers in the West explain that the *de facto* impact of the priest shortage is to deny laity everywhere ready access to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. It imposes a fast from our most basic nourishment, forcing laity to travel further – sometimes much further — to find celebrations occurring at times available in their jammed and complicated schedules.

⁶⁷⁷ While not a common expression in the West, it is well known in Africa. Archbishop Ndingi used the term in his intervention at the First African Synod in 1994.

⁶⁷⁸ This figure is quoted in Joseph Healey, “Beyond Vatican II: Imagining the Catholic Church of Nairobi I,” in Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator (ed.), *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016 and Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2016, p. 199.

especially the case in Asia, Africa, and Latin America but also to some extent in Europe and North America. We cannot allow this situation to continue.⁶⁷⁹

Tanzanian theologian Father Peter Assenga, AJ states that “the reality of the Church expressed as SCC would be an ideal model of church as family.”⁶⁸⁰ He bases this view on the realization that the inner nature of the church is that of a community. The church is seen as a community (or communion) of communities, a family of families. He connects this to the biblical references to the early Household Churches (see *Ephesians 2:19*: “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God”) that are also called Early Household Church Gatherings and First Century SCCs and to the reality of the African family in its extended form. Assenga emphasizes that for SCCs to show effectively their full potential in realizing the African family model of church

the entire life of the Church must be done within their context. This may include not only the other sacraments within the competence of the parish but also the entire life of the faithful in their contexts: this includes the blessing of the seed for planting, blessing of the farms and their produce; it can also include the entire mechanism of conflict resolution in the various genres of the *palaver*.⁶⁸¹

To give the praxis or practical dimension he presents case studies of SCCs in Mwanza Archdiocese and Moshi Diocese in Tanzania.

Expanding this “household” metaphor above, the basic unit in the Greco-Roman world of the *New Testament* was the household: the physical home or compound that included the slaves in the family. The new Christian household is where all have equal dignity as children of God,⁶⁸² adopted into the family of God. The church is the new “household of God’s reign.” This is related to the deeply Trinitarian theology of the church as a communion of persons.

In Africa we can refer to SCCs as the homestead of God in rural areas and the household of God in urban areas. SCCs are Household Churches. SCCs are small households of faith. The extended family is the extended homestead and the extended household.

⁶⁷⁹ Bishop Fritz Lobinger, “Homegrown Clergy: The Case for a New Kind of Priesthood,” *US Catholic* Website, retrieved on 30 December, 2016, <http://www.uscatholic.org/ordainelders>

⁶⁸⁰ Peter Assenga, *Towards an African Model of Church as Family: A Socio-Anthropological, Ecclesiological and Pastoral Study Based on Family Structures and Community Building Rituals among the Chagga in Tanzania*, Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2009, p. 262.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

⁶⁸² As I travel around Eastern Africa when I am introduced at a meeting or workshop and asked to say a few words about myself, I like to begin by saying: “I am Father Joe Healey. I am a child of God.” This says it all.

In the *Final Message of the Bishops of Africa to the People of God* of the First African Synod, Section 28 on "The Church as Family and Small Christian Communities" states: "The Church, the Family of God, implies the creation of small communities at the human level, living or basic ecclesial communities... These individual Churches as Families have the task of working to transform society." Flynn states: "It is in being transforming communities [of themselves and others] that SCCs realize their ecclesial identity in the Church as Family Model. These individual [communities of] Church as Family have the task of working to transform society."⁶⁸³ A key part of this transformation is a deeper evangelization that proclaims that the water of Baptism is "thicker" than the blood of tribalism, negative ethnicity and nepotism and promotes true communion between different ethnic groups. SCCs give flesh to the African concept of family, based not on common blood but on common faith.

During research in Nairobi we met a new "entity" – Cultural Associations: Catholics in a particular area of a parish who promote the cultural values of their own ethnic group (Kamba, Kikuyu, Luo, Luyia, etc.) through music, dancing, traditional meals, bereavement customs, and burial rites together rather than joining a multi-ethnic SCC in their neighborhood (geographic area). These exclusive associations are not genuine SCCs.

When asked about the reason for this discrimination and exclusivism, Kenyan layman Julius Karanja, the catechist in Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish, Dagoretti Corner in Nairobi Archdiocese said: "The spirituality of the Christians is not deep enough." In other words, we are challenged to promote a deeper evangelization in the SCCs where the SCC members are not simply catechized but genuinely evangelized on a deeper level. The expression "deeper evangelization" has been translated into various African languages to challenge Christians on the local level.

Many statements from Second African Synod documents recommend the regular use of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. We are challenged in the AMECEA Region to continue to develop both a praxis and a theology of SCCs' involvement in the transformation of society. This is part of the social responsibility of SCCs as the family of God in Africa in the context of family Ecclesiology in Africa. As a concrete example, in Zambia Small Christian Communities, at the lowest level, are really trying to get away from their old mentalities and thus changing the world around them by listening to the Word of God and the social teaching of the Church.

To summarize: In his well-known book *Models of Church* and in a subsequent book, American theologian Cardinal Avery Dulles, SJ categorized the church into six models: institution, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, servant and community of disciples. Over the years various African models of church have evolved. These are related to the People of God Model that emerged from the Second Vatican Council. The Church as Family of God Model emerged from the First African Synod. The Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church is significant today especially in Eastern Africa.

Donald Sybertz and I wrote *Towards an African Narrative Theology*. Section Four on "African Metaphors of Church" in Chapter Three on "Church as the [Extended] Family of

⁶⁸³ Flynn, *Communities*, p. 99.

God” describes some African metaphors or images or symbols or models of church using African proverbs, sayings and stories.

- a. The Church as the Extended Family of God.
- b. The Church as the Clan of Jesus Christ.
- c. The Church as the Universal Family in Christ.

American Theologian Paul Sankey points out: "Avery Dulles has categorized theories of church into a number of models: institution, mystic communion, sacrament, herald, and servant. A possible African model is the church as clan, a family or social group related to a common ancestor."⁶⁸⁴

It has been suggested that an African theologian write an article describing these specific African Models of Church. These models can contribute substantially to the ongoing discussion in the World Church on ecclesial collegiality, synodality (basically the relationship between the College of Bishops and the pope), collaboration, dialog and subsidiarity.

As African theologians explore more deeply the Church as Family of God Model of Church, we see the growing importance of the Small Christian Community Model of Church that is closely related to the Communion of Communities Model of Church and the Communitarian Model of Church. The Communitarian/Participatory/Collaborative/Circular/Inductive/Bottom-up Model can be compared and contrasted to the Hierarchical/Institutional/Pyramid/Deductive/Top-down Model.⁶⁸⁵

In various SCCs Training Workshops we use a very simple, but effective demonstration (role play) on unity, cooperation and the “Communitarian Model of Church”.⁶⁸⁶ First, six volunteers walk in single file in one direction. The facilitator asks, "Who is in front?" and all of the workshop participants give the name the person in the front of the line. The facilitator asks, "Who is last in the line?" and the participants gave the name of the last person. Then the facilitator asked the six people to turn around and walk in the opposite direction. The same two questions are asked but the names were reversed. Then the facilitator asks the six volunteers to join hands and stand in a circle. When asked, "Who is first?" the participants answer, "No one." When asked, "Who is last?" the participants answer, "No one." The teaching is clear. We are challenged to overcome our intense individualism, excessive competitiveness and exaggerated rivalries to work together in building community and emphasizing a horizontal (a circle) rather than a vertical (pyramid) model of church.

⁶⁸⁴ Paul Sankey, “The Church as Clan: Critical Reflections on African Ecclesiology,” *International Review of Mission*, 83, 33 (July, 1994), p. 437.

⁶⁸⁵ See the section” “Small Christian Communities: Ecclesiologies and Models of Church” in Flynn, *Communities*, pp. 67-81.

⁶⁸⁶ I first saw this demonstration (role play) performed by five-year-old children in the Montessori School on the grounds of Assumption of Mary Parish (Umoja) in Nairobi, Kenya. I have used this demonstration many times including during an international meeting of professors of mission in the USA in 2004.

In describing how SCCs are one of the new pastoral experiences, one of the new ways of living Catholicism today, American theologian of pastoral communication Father Robert White, SJ states:

One of the challenges to theology today is to articulate the ecclesial identity of our time—a major aspect of which are Small Christian Communities—and the new theology of communication that is expressed in these communities. Given the fact that the SCCs have flourished especially in the churches of the Global South, the theology of the Church in the Global South will certainly play a major role in generating a new sense of ecclesial identity in the Church as a whole. The SCCs have summed up well the new forms of communication emerging in the Church—participatory, aimed at consciousness-raising, from the grassroots up, dialogical, peace building.⁶⁸⁷

American writer David Andrews asserts that the establishment of SCCS has recreated a contemporary paradigm or model of being church that is biblical, quasi – democratic, African, particular, local yet universal, and Catholic.⁶⁸⁸

White goes on explain the task of theologians:

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor, then Archbishop of Westminster in London, in his brief introduction to the book edited by Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton,⁶⁸⁹ *Small Christian Communities Today*, called Small Christian Communities the heart of renewal in the Church today. Cardinal Murphy-O’Connor further referred to the SCCs as a “global moment” of renewal. It is up to theologians and especially theologians of pastoral communication to articulate what this global moment of renewal means and how we are to live in union with the 2000-year-old history of the Church.⁶⁹⁰

One example is African proverb-based communion Ecclesiology that has clear implications for developing a Small Christian Community Model of Church both in terms of theology and praxis. Proverbs reflect the traditional values of African community, participation, consensus, and solidarity. These values support a communitarian model of church that Africa can contribute to the World Church. The African experience of living ecclesial communion in the extended family, clan, SCCs, and the wider "communion of communities" circles enriches the universal church. A group of African theologians and Africanists stated:

⁶⁸⁷ Robert White, “Small Christian Communities – A Dynamic Christianity for Young People,” Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2011, pp. 17-18.

⁶⁸⁸ David Andrews, *Ministry in the Small Church*, Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1988. pp. 16-19.

⁶⁸⁹ Sadly Jeanne died of severe liver cancer in Plymouth, England on 1 May, 2016. She was a long time international SCCs member, leader, animator and author who really “walked the walk.”

⁶⁹⁰ Robert White, “Small Christian Communities – A Dynamic Christianity,” p. 18.

The natural African communities which in fact inspired the original formation of SCCs is one of the African experiences closest to the gospel. This must be given due credit so that the African contribution to the maturation of the church as communion and the African development of an adequate pastoral methodology be highlighted.⁶⁹¹

At the same time the gospel and contemporary church praxis challenge African values as emphasized in a meeting on *communio-Ecclesiology* in Nairobi in 1993. "The traditional values of African solidarity and authority in the SCCs should be assimilated in the Christian interpretation and in this process become enriched and transformed."⁶⁹² In particular the consensus model of authority should be promoted rather than the hierarchical model. "The mentality of the whole church needs to shift from the pyramid model to the community model of leadership."⁶⁹³

The African organization of the Christian community (Ecclesiology) offers some fresh insights. Waliggo points out:

The *koinonia* practiced in the early church is nothing but familial relationship. Every believer is a brother or sister to the other. It was only through the subsequent development of the church that this relational and charismatic model of the church became weak and was gradually substituted with the institutional model. One of the signs of the times in the church has been the reawakening of this familial model through small groups, charismatic groups and others.⁶⁹⁴

The official document after the 1987 World Synod of Bishops on "Laity" states: "The Ecclesiology of communion is a central and fundamental concept in the (Vatican II) conciliar documents."⁶⁹⁵ German theologian Cardinal Walter Kasper comments:

The interest of the laity and its willingness to assume co-responsibility is perhaps the most valuable and important contribution of the postconciliar period. Not in vain did Venerable Pope Paul VI designate in *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, 58 the truly ecclesiastical base communities as a hope for the universal church. *Communio-Ecclesiology* means indeed that there may not be in the church active members beside passive ones; *communio-Ecclesiology* puts an end to the model of a pastoral practice based on care and maintenance.⁶⁹⁶

⁶⁹¹ *Cast Away Fear*, Nairobi: New People Media Center, 1994, pp. 25-26.

⁶⁹² *Final Statement of the Symposium on "The Reception of the Communio-Ecclesiology of the Second Vatican Council,"* Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 1993, p. 3

⁶⁹³ *Cast Away Fear*, p. 26.

⁶⁹⁴ Waliggo, "The African Clan as the True Model of the African Church," p. 125.

⁶⁹⁵ *Apostolic Exhortation on the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful*, No. 19.

⁶⁹⁶ Walter Kasper, "Church as Communio," p. 115.

This is closely related to the vision of church presented by the teaching materials of the Lumko Missiological Institute in South Africa. In its fifth and final stage of growth the church is a "communion of communities." All the believers of a parish are invited to be active members of a Small Christian Community. This theological vision is described as follows:

These communities are part of the parish structure. One of their number is a member of the parish council and all of them are engaged in various liturgical and other activities that keep them linked together and in union with the wider church. It is in this model of a Local Church that the renewed Ecclesiology of Vatican II can be lived out, with all members of the church seen as equals and taking responsibility for their lives.⁶⁹⁷

Many terms are used to describe the Universal Church: the Big Church, the Global Church, the Great Church, the Greater Church, the International Church, the Large Church, the Multicultural Church, the Wider Church, and the World-wide Church. But *World Church* has caught on as really portraying the spirit of the post-Vatican II period: a communion of Local Churches on six continents and an international church of rich and striking diversity in praxis and theology. The Local Churches in Africa actively participate in this communion contributing many things such as: the fastest growing Catholic Church on any continent in the world; a familial and experiential model based on participation; and the theology and praxis of SCCs which is one of the African Church's most important contributions to the World Church.

Our newest theological challenge is to explore more fully how all the above fits into the "theological framework of addressing key issues and challenges of 'New Evangelization in Solidarity in the AMECEA countries'" as recommended by the AMECEA Plenary Study Session in July, 2011. Some theological, pastoral, and social questions (challenges, problems, issues) that SCCs members can reflect on using the Pastoral Spiral process/methodology are (in alphabetical order): Abortion, Addiction, Annulments, Communion for Catholic in Polygamous Unions, Communion for Divorced and Remarried Catholics, Corruption, Helping Couples Get Married in Church, Insecurity, Jobs for Youth, Poor Governance, Poverty, Single Mothers, Tensions Between Husband and Wife and Tribalism. The starting point is the SCC members' personal experience on the grassroots level (the local context), not a book, dogma or church teaching.

New pastoral decisions, recommendations and practices are part of the *sensus fidelium* (Latin for "sense of the faithful" – the body of the faithful as a whole, the People of God) that should be recognized and valued by higher church authority. The other term used is *sensus fidei* (Latin for "sense of the faith").⁶⁹⁸ Some feel that the most complete term is *sensus fidei*

⁶⁹⁷ Anselm Prior, "Equipping the People of God for Christian Witness -- A Roman Catholic Account," *International Review of Mission*, 83, 328 (January, 1994): 59.

⁶⁹⁸ English Cardinal John Henry Newman in his essay "On Consulting the Faithful on Matters of Doctrine" stated: "The tradition of the Apostles ... manifests itself variously at various times: sometimes by the mouth of the episcopacy ... sometimes by the doctors, sometimes by the people, sometimes by liturgies, rites, ceremonies, and customs, by events, disputes,

fidelium (Latin for the collective “sense of the faithful” of the People of God or whole church).⁶⁹⁹

No. 12 of *Lumen Gentium* (*Dogmatic Constitution of the Church of the Church*) states:

The entire body of the faithful, anointed as they are by the Holy One, cannot err in matters of belief. They manifest this special property by means of the whole people's supernatural discernment in matters of faith when "from the Bishops down to the last of the lay faithful" they show universal agreement in matters of faith and morals. That discernment in matters of faith is aroused and sustained by the Spirit of truth. It is exercised under the guidance of the sacred teaching authority, in faithful and respectful obedience to which the People of God accepts that which is not just the word of men but truly the word of God.⁷⁰⁰

See the popular universal Latin saying *vox populi, vox Dei* (*the voice of the people is the voice of God*) and the African proverbs: *The voice of many is heard by God. The voice of the people is the voice of God. Where there are many people God is there.*

In No. 119 of *The Joy of the Gospel* Pope Francis states:

In all the baptized, from first to last, the sanctifying power of the Spirit is at work, impelling us to evangelization. The People of God is holy thanks to this anointing, which makes it infallible *in credendo*. This means that it does not err in faith, even though it may not find words to explain that faith. The Spirit guides it in truth and leads it to salvation. As part of his mysterious love for humanity, God furnishes the totality of the faithful with an *instinct of faith -- sensus fidei --* which helps them to discern what is truly of God. The presence of the Spirit gives Christians a certain connaturality with divine realities, and a wisdom which enables them to grasp those realities intuitively, even when they lack the wherewithal to give them precise expression.

The International Theological Commission in its 2014 document on “*Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*” explained the role of *sensus fidei* in the Catholic Church. This term is used to describe the people's collective ability to discern how the Gospel applies to their lives. The document focuses on ways to identify 'authentic' contributions to *sensus fidei* using two criteria: conformity to the apostolic tradition, and active participation in the life of the Church. The document's release coincides with the survey sent to episcopal conferences on the upcoming Synod of the Family.

movements ... It follows that none of these channels of tradition may be treated with disrespect.”

⁶⁹⁹ Latin American theologians such as Gustavo Gutierrez, OP and Maria Clara Lucchetti Binger emphasize that contributions to the *sensus fidelium* from Latin America include liberation theology, the preferential option for the poor, base communities and “women listening to women.”

⁷⁰⁰ Also in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Nos. 92-93.

Hopefully the SCCs in Eastern Africa will be able to contribute to the Extraordinary World Synod of Bishops on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization," to take place in Rome from 5-19 October, 2014. According to the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*, an "extraordinary general session" of the synod is held to "deal with matters which require a speedy solution." In emphasizing the church's response to critical pastoral issues Pope Francis invites us to understand "frontier" in a much more expansive way and to reach out to those who don't see much value in organized religion or who have been overlooked or excluded. He said that "a synodal [collegial] approach should be taken to the study" of the problems facing the family and marriage.

This chapter has summarized the contribution of SCCs to the content of the theology of the Church as Family of God in particular and the theology of communion and community in general. It is also important to describe and analyze the specific theological methods⁷⁰¹ or processes that are part of the overall contextual theological methodologies in Africa.

Historically, some seeds were sown when the Ecumenical Symposium of Eastern African Theologians (ESEAT) was formed in 1987 to promote contextual theology in Eastern Africa. In the symposium ecumenical scholars from all types of Christianity meet every year a week before Palm Sunday in a sharing and learning process that has continued until today. They present papers that are critiqued by their peers⁷⁰² as their diverse theological perspectives interact with and challenge each other in a process of mutual consultation. Then they revise and update the papers. These scholars are prolific in research and ecumenically minded, willing to work as a team and committed to open learning that can deepen faith and extend their research horizons. This enhances the communal development of their contextual theology.

Their revised papers were published in 10 annual volumes in the "African Christianity Series" (1989-2002) on such topics as Christology, Ecclesiology, Missiology, Moral Theology, Pastoral Theology, Biblical Theology and Liturgy. The seventh volume was *Theological Method and Aspects of African Worship in African Christianity* (1998). Later topics including violence, democracy and reconciliation, poverty, challenges of the church in the 21st century, religion and health, religion and politics, urban ministry, ethnicity and peacebuilding were being published in the ongoing "ESEAT Series" (2005-2013).⁷⁰³ It is interesting to track and analysis the shift in content in the two series.

⁷⁰¹ An interesting background to this discussion is Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology*.

⁷⁰² Part of this process is the development of a strong tradition of peer review in the African Christian theological journals in Kenya including *African Christian Studies*, *Hekima Review*, *Spearhead Series* and *Tangaza Journal of Theology and Mission*. There is a close link between the process in revising and updating papers in various conferences and revising and updating articles for final publication in journals and books of collected essays.

⁷⁰³ Summarized from Philomena Mwaura, "Regional Theological Associations and Theological Curriculum Development in East Africa: Challenges and Prospects," *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2 (2010), pps. 248-258, retrieved on 21 August, 2014, [http://docs.mak.ac.ug/sites/default/files/Regional%20Theological%20Associations%20and%](http://docs.mak.ac.ug/sites/default/files/Regional%20Theological%20Associations%20and%20)

In this contextual process African theologians must be involved with the real problems of Africa. Ngalula points out:

Theological research and publications must be linked to the present life of the church in Africa. African theologians must be attentive to the ways African Christians try to live their faith in Jesus Christ and strive to give evangelical responses to the questions raised in their own contexts especially in Small Christian Communities (SCCs).⁷⁰⁴

Today there is an emphasis on a new African Theological Process or Method or that is called by a variety of names: “African *Palaver* Theology;”⁷⁰⁵ “African Theology as

[20Theological%20Curriculum%20Development%20in%20East%20Africa%20-%20Philomena%20Mwaura.pdf](#)

⁷⁰⁴ José Ngalula, “A Practice of Theology at the Service of African Societies: Some Lessons from the Experience of the Collections ‘The Bible and Women in Africa’” in Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, (ed.), *Theological Reimagination: Conversations on Church, Religion and Society in Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2014, p. 132.

⁷⁰⁵ Due to the considerable investment of time and energy necessary for successful *palaver*, the idea of *palaver* as a mechanism has often been derided as a typically African exercise in unproductive talk. But there are positive examples in everyday life such as marriage counseling, consensus at Parish Pastoral Council Meetings and making joint decisions at a SCC Meeting. Research shows that consensus and ownership of a decision in SCC meetings in Africa is long, slow and winding process especially in money matters.

American diocesan missionary priest Father Bill Vos comments:

It is good to have the experience that I had in processing pastoral issues while in Tanzania articulated as a theological method! I recall the experience that took some "learning" on my part of sitting with a *baraza* where everyone spoke. The people not infrequently repeated what had already been said and verbally chewed on an issue from all sides. It was painstakingly long for me, but eventually resulting in a consensus. Initially I said to myself, "what happened!", we didn't vote on it!" But I learned and came to appreciate the benefits including avoiding the "win-lose" aspect of decision-making by an up or down vote, and the positive side of it, an agreement that allowed everyone to "own it."

Email message to the author dated 3 September, 2013.

There are also positive examples of using *palaver* in the political area. Examples are Kofi Anan's long, patient and seemingly endless discussions with Mwai Kibaki and Raila Odinga on resolving the Kenya political crisis in 2008. The various mechanisms for peace making, conflict resolution and social transformation in Africa such as the Gecaca Courts in Rwanda and the *Mato Oput* process in Northern Uganda. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa that is really a modernized form of African *palaver*. See Richard Kimosop Chelimo, “The Palaver: A Model To Reconcile Africa?” *SEDOS Bulletin*, 2011, No. 199. SEDOS Website, retrieved 30 July, 2014,

Conversation;” “African Conversation Theology;” African Christian *Palaver* Theology;” and “African Christian Conversation Theology.”⁷⁰⁶ or just “*Palaver* Theology”/“Conversational Theology”). It is both the name of a process/ method of theology and the name of the type of content of theology (like Liberation Theology). Method heavily influences/determines content and vice versa. It is a two-way process that illuminates and enriches African values and Christian values.

This *Palaver* Theology is similar to Mango Tree Theology, Theology Under a Tree, Shade Tree Theology, Story-telling Theology, African Reverential Dialog⁷⁰⁷ and *Matatu* Theology.⁷⁰⁸ This terms can describe the ordinary conversation of, and with, African village peasants/university students/lay leaders who come together to interpret the Gospel in the light of the pressing challenges of their circumstances. This theology focuses on the empowerment of peasants. See the ideas of Bénézet Bujo, Jean Marc Ela, Emmanuel Katongole, Teresa Okure and Elochukwu Uzukwu. This is related to what Sister Ilia Delio, OFM the American Franciscan woman theologian who seems less inclined to do traditional academic theology says: "I'd like to do theology with the people in the malls, in the parks and on Facebook."⁷⁰⁹

This is African Theology as Conversation,⁷¹⁰ Active Dialog, Intensive Listening and Learning from Each Other (described as “listening in conversation”) and Consensus.

http://www.sedosmission.org/web/en/mission-articles-2/doc_view/1845-the-palaver-a-model-to-reconcile-africa

⁷⁰⁶ Terminology is a complex issue. Among the many types of African Theology there is African Islamic Theology and African [Traditional] Religion Theology. Within African Christian Theology there are many types or streams (in alphabetical order): Catholic, Evangelical, Mainline Protestant and Pentecostal.

⁷⁰⁷ Tanzanian diocesan priest Nicholas Segeja wrote his Doctorate Dissertation in the Pastoral Department at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) on *An Ecclesiology of Reverential Dialog in the Family* (*Shikome*).

⁷⁰⁸ *Matatu* Theology or *Matatu* Philosophy was coined in Nairobi to describe a theology of streets, of the grassroots, of ordinary people. *Matatu* (the Swahili word for 30 cents in the local Kenyan currency or the original cost of a bus ride) is the small minivan is that is the most popular means of public transportation in Kenya. This a form of theology and theologizing that is not the academic theology of the university and the theological college, but of ordinary people riding in their minivans. This was popularized by Rodrigo Mejia and is described in Sahaya Selvam, “A *Matatu* Theology,” *Beyond the Ordinary: The Spiritual Journal of a Missionary*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006, pp. 15-18.

⁷⁰⁹ Jamie Manson, “The Evolution of Ilia Delio,” 16 July, 2014, National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved 20 July, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/grace-margins/evolution-ilia-delio>

⁷¹⁰ In the meetings and writings of theologians worldwide the idea of Catholic theology as “conversation” is becoming more and more common. A report of the annual conference of the Catholic Theological Association in Durham, England in September, 2013 states: “All the members seem to like the idea of Catholic theology as a ‘conversation’”. Brendan Walsh,

Conversation is a very important way of doing theology on the continent of Africa.⁷¹¹ This is a new way of doing African Christian Theology that is conversational, participatory, collaborative, cross-disciplinary, and multi-generational. It includes oral theological conversation. American Mennonite theologian Harold Miller who has served in East Africa for many years says:

“*Palaver* theology” is a genre whose time has come. A most helpful addition to the range of approaches already commonplace...The connection between the spoken Word, on the one hand, and physical, social, spiritual and political realities, on the other, has been noted and highlighted by African theologians. In this regard, Bénézet Bujo wrote the following: “[In Africa] the word possesses such tremendous power that it can either create or destroy the community. This means that the word signifies life or death—it is medicine or poison. But it depends on the speaker whether the word brings life or death. Africans hold that when one hears the word, one also eats it and drinks it. Thus it is important how the word is digested, so that it may be invested anew in the community” (“The Palaver as Process for Discovering and Justifying Norms” in the book: *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*, Paulines Publications Africa. 2003. Nairobi, Kenya. p. 68).⁷¹²

Kenyan laywoman theologian Teresia Hinga states:

I would urge efforts to enhance the marketability of edited volumes rather than abandon publishing these collaborative works and joint authorship. I urge support of this kind of publishing because as I have argued elsewhere (see “Acknowledgments” pages of my book *African, Christian, Feminist*), such collaboration arises out of methodological imperatives in Africa. Instead of competition and publishing for individual enhancement, an emerging, and in my view most commendable, trend is towards collaborative research, writing and publishing on “Matters that Matter in Africa.” Writing in community, and for the enrichment of community (for the Common Good), is an idea perhaps well captured by the notion of *palaver* as I explain in my book.

And so, rather than hesitating to publish works produced by communities of scholars using the *Palaver* Model, I would urge support, even extra support, for these kinds of books for several reasons:

“Meet the Glums,” *Tablet*, 21 September, 2013, p.15. We can ask: “Is the West finally learning from Africa?”

A related example is the title “A Conversation on African Spirituality” for the Book Launch of African theologian Laurenti Magesa’s book *What is Not Sacred? African Spirituality* at Tangaza Theological College in Nairobi on 7 April, 2014.

⁷¹¹ American theologian David Tracy writes about “theology as a conversation” as part of theological method.

⁷¹² Harold Miller in an email to the author dated 28 October, 2013.

1. This collaborative model does not supplant individual publication; rather it complements it since would-be authors of individual manuscripts can learn useful skills from and with each other when they participate in such communal *palavers* for publication.
2. Moreover, ideologically and from an African theological perspective, collaboration rather than competition is the more morally viable path in many contexts and not just in book writing.
3. The *palaver* model and the resulting anthologies also allow “multiple voices” to emerge and to be heard -- another added benefit of writing collaboratively rather than competitively.⁷¹³

Carney gives a concrete example in DRC:

Congolese CEVBs embrace a well-honed process of Christian communal reconciliation following the African model of “palaver.” In the traditional palaver model, community elders would gather with representatives of the disputing sides, offering them the opportunity to dialog on their grievances and ritually celebrate their reconciliation. In contemporary Congo, CEVB advocates and other parish leaders known as “Guardians of Reconciliation” serve in these mediating roles. Both sides are given the opportunity to discuss openly and honestly their perspectives on the conflict, and perpetrators are urged to take responsibility for their actions. Once a resolution has been reached, perpetrators signal reconciliation through giving victims a chicken, goat, house or other material sign of repentance. Reconciliation is then ritually marked within the broader community; the conflicting sides publicly hug, shake hands, and share a meal together. In the words of one Tshumbe CEVB leader, “you can’t eat with your enemy,” so the shared meal is perhaps the most important sign of communal reconciliation.⁷¹⁴

The starting point of this kind of African Christian Theology is both context and experience.⁷¹⁵ Local, contextual theologies can be constructed in Africa with the local

⁷¹³ Teresia Hinga in Joseph Healey, “Creative Ways of Promoting ‘Africa Matters’ -- Part II 2017 Report of the Africa Region to the Orbis Books Advisory Committee Meeting,” Maryknoll, NY: privately photocopied, p. 3.

⁷¹⁴ J.J. Carney, “The People Bonded Together,” p. 316.

⁷¹⁵ Experience as the starting point of theology is especially true throughout the Global South (Africa, Asia and Latin America). Sri Lankan Redemptorist theologian Father Vimal Tirimanna, CSSR, explains this very well:

The “classical European theology” perceives faith as a body of truths and dogmas and uses philosophy to explain them. Asian theology, on the other hand, starts with the experience of the faith and analyzes concrete situations with the help of sociology, psychology and

community/communities as “theologian.” The SCC is a natural place (*locus*) of theology and theological conversation.

Orobator writes:

Doing theology is not an isolated enterprise, particularly in Africa where doing theology is a community event. At Hekima University College where I teach, one of my favorite classes is called simply “*Palaver Session*.” This is the time when students sit in a round hut and talk about God, faith, and their religious experiences in an African context. Sometimes we have something to drink and munch on as we dialog, debate and converse.⁷¹⁶

Canadian theologian Ms. Diane Stinton writes:

As the conversations spread across Africa today, theologians call for “Christian *palaver*.” The term “palaver” comes from the Portuguese word ‘*palavra*’, meaning “speech” or “word,” stemming from the Latin *parabola* (“parable”, “speech”).

The English term “palaver” often carries the sense of prolonged, tiresome talk or idle chatter – “talking on and on” -- used in a pejorative sense. Palaver can also be associated with problem solving. Thus various commentators have said that the word palaver just carries too much “negative baggage” to be used effectively in the West. An exception are Black American and African women theologians in the USA who use the process in their theologizing.⁷¹⁷

The concept and practice of “palaver” in Africa is very different. The fundamental notion of “word” remains at the heart of African palaver, where the word, whether spoken or unspoken, carries great power for it can either create or destroy the community. The word may be danced or dramatized or symbolized in art, or manifested in action or behavior within the community. Importantly, in Africa the concept of community is three dimensional, encompassing the living, the dead, and those not yet born. So, as Laurenti Magesa explains, “The sole purpose of the African *palaver* aims at creating, strengthening or restoring relationships for the sake of “the fullness” of life of the community through fellowship among all three dimensions of

anthropology along with Asian resources. What matters to the bishops in Asia is the daily experiences of their people rather than “purely abstract theological concepts.”

Jose Kavi, “Catholic Moral Theologians Scan Asian Reality,” *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, 14-27 August, 2015, *NCR Website*, retrieved on 13 August, 2015, <http://ncronline.org/news/global/catholic-moral-theologians-scan-asian-reality>

⁷¹⁶ Orobator, Agbonkhanmeghe E., *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, Maryknoll, New York, USA: Orbis Books, 2008, page xi.

⁷¹⁷ Based on conversations with John Sivalon, Randy Young, Helen Mugambi and others.

the community.”⁷¹⁸ In addition, the community exists only in relation to the Transcendent and the entire cosmos.

Bénézet Bujo adds that “the art of the *palaver* consists in setting out on a journey of exploration.”⁷¹⁹ Every member of the community has the right to participate, whether in speech or symbolic action. Hence African *palaver* guarantees equality in terms of accessing speech. In addition, the community reaches decisions not by compromise or voting according to the majority view, but only by establishing a solid consensus among all members. Thus the fundamental experience is based on communion; as participants engage together in “receiving,” “chewing” and “digesting” those words that bring life to the community. As Bujo explains, “In the *palaver* each person who speaks is a *ruminant* who, like certain animals, rechews the word eaten and drunk for a long time. In this way each person who speaks puts their word to the test so that the community can confirm or invalidate the vivifying effectiveness of what comes out of the mouth.”⁷²⁰

In the context of Christian *palaver*, the creative, life-giving Word of God has now become flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. Just as the Emmaus disciples came to perceive the Risen Jesus in the opening of Scripture and the breaking of bread, with overtones of the Eucharist celebration, so African believers come to perceive Christ’s presence today through reflecting on Scripture and engaging in Christian worship and ministry. African *palaver* thus provides one image for understanding African theology, in terms of a serious conversation among believers who meditatively chew on the Word of God in their respective contexts and offer an interpretation of its meaning and implications for communal consideration.⁷²¹

A Case Study of this *palaver* or conversation method or process is seen in the development of the essays in the book *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace – the Second African Synod* edited by Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator who explains:

This methodology of dialog and “listening in conversation” has been adapted to the purposes of this book. The preparatory phase included a two-day conference in Nairobi, Kenya, in March 2010. The conference served as the occasion for exploring the synodal literature and conducting intensive

⁷¹⁸ Laurenti Magesa, *Anatomy of Inculturation: Transforming the Church in Africa*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004, p. 161.

⁷¹⁹ Bénézet Bujo, *Foundations of an African Ethic: Beyond the Universal Claims of Western Morality*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2001, p. 76. A fuller treatment of the meaning of *palaver* can be found in this book.

⁷²⁰ Bénézet Bujo, *Christmas: God Becomes Man in Black Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995.

⁷²¹ Diane Stinton in the “Introduction” to Stinton, Diane (ed.). *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations*, London: SPCK International Study Guide 46, 2010.

discussion among the contributors and other invited participants. As a condition for participation, contributors submitted their papers in advance; the papers were distributed ahead of the conference to all participants [to be read and reflected upon ahead of time]. At the conference, each contributor briefly summarized the central thesis of his or her paper, following which a designated respondent presented a critical response.⁷²² Each paper was then subjected to an intensive discussion by all attendees. This volume contains the papers revised and edited for publication in light of the overall discussion and conclusions⁷²³ of the conference. Not all the papers are published in this volume, but the final list of chapters represents the fruit of active dialog and intensive listening among theologians and friends. It exemplifies the practice of palaver that emphasizes open conversation in community and prioritizes consensus over confrontation. The conversational ethics of dialog and listening characteristic of the Second African Synod provides the foundation and inspiration for this volume on reconciliation, justice, and peace.⁷²⁴

“*Palaver sessions*”⁷²⁵ referred to the participants engaging in open conversations in view of contributing to and clarifying their understanding of the specific topics of African Christianity/African Christian Theology under consideration. A unique feature was that participants actively engaged in a cumulative learning process. They didn’t just wait their

⁷²² This process is very different from many conferences in Rome and other places that begins with a top down approach: a series of magisterial lectures with little time for interaction and open discussion.

⁷²³ Conclusions included using a uniform style in the writing and editing of the essays, for example, using “African Religion” rather than “African Traditional Religion.”

The complexity of language, words and meanings was emphasized and how meanings shift according to context. In English more and more the word “traditional” has a “negative”/“primitive”/“backward”/“old fashioned” meaning or ring to it. The word is more positive in French. “Indigenous” still has a positive meaning in the sense of “local.” Two further examples: “Traditional” can be negative in terms of culture as in “traditional religions” and “traditional people.” But it is positive in the sense of the “Church Tradition” or the “Tradition of the Church” capitalized (the historical teaching of the Christian Church such as the Patristic Period in the first centuries AD). “Primitive” can be negative in terms of culture as in “primitive religions” and “primitive people.” But it is positive in the sense of the “Primitive Church” capitalized (the Christian Church in the first centuries AD).

Based on discussions with Laurenti Magesa and Helen Mugambi.

⁷²⁴ Orobator, *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, page 3.

⁷²⁵ The international Theological Colloquium on Church, Religion and Society in Africa (TCCRSA) is a “Three-year Theological Research Project in the Currents of the 50th Anniversary of Vatican II” taking place in Nairobi in 2013-2015. This conversation theological research seminar uses *palaver* sessions, *baraza* sessions to provoke discussion and conversation (the art of theological discourse and conversation) and a roundtable on African theology that is a live/informal interactive session.

turn to give prepared comments on the original paper. Their comments added to and built on earlier comments. This created a process of evolving clarity and mutual enrichment. The writers' final drafts included new ideas and insights from the conference's theological conversations. Some of the final essays in the book added references to other writers' essays and newly learned ideas. For example, the essay on women in Africa and the essay on laity in Zimbabwe quoted ideas from the essay on "Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa."

The published volume reflected the dynamics of these conversations. Kenyan theologian Jesse Mugambi, the publisher of the African Edition of this book, emphasizes that "palaver then becomes a 'conversational' method of expressing theological insights."⁷²⁶ Several essays in the book refer to SCCs including one full essay on "Small Christian Communities: 'Promoters of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Eastern Africa.'"

But Mugambi prefers the term "African Theology as Conversation" to "African Palaver Theology" for several reasons. The latter expression carries too much baggage. To many people in Africa *palaver* is an obscure word and not well known. It does not communicate "Africanness." It connotes superficial talk, even long-winded, idle, and useless chatter. It comes across as "theology lite." He likes "African Theology as Conversation" even better than "African Conversation Theology" because the emphasis is on the conversation process. Similarly he prefers Theology of Liberation to Liberation Theology because it gives more weight to the liberation process.⁷²⁷

At the Second Theological Colloquium on Church, Religion and Society in Africa (TCCRSA II) in Nairobi, Kenya in August, 2014 several participants pointed out that the word *palaver* carries a lot of semantic baggage regarding its history and meaning. The word has too many negative connotations and association. It can distract people from the more important topic of the method of African theology itself. So they prefer the more neutral term "African Theology as Conversation."

But the process is clear: "I wanted to make a shift from individual, isolated theologians ruminating on faith and life issues," Orobator explained. Instead, he is trying to create something new – "a small community of theologians conversing, collaborating and conducting research on Church, religion and society."⁷²⁸ He said that the book of colloquium papers intended to go beyond the immediate concerns of the African theology and be a contribution to the universal church. It will serve as a catalyst for wide-ranging cross-cultural and critical conversations on church, religion and society.

Writing in 2014 Orobator states: "Of all the models of conversational and communicative styles in African cultures *palaver* seems the most theologically fertile."⁷²⁹

⁷²⁶ Jesse Mugambi in an email to the author dated 19 November, 2010.

⁷²⁷ Summary of the author's conversation with Jesse Mugambi in Nairobi on 12 October, 2013.

⁷²⁸ See Brendan Walsh, "African Paradoxes," *Tablet* 23 October 2014, Tablet Website, retrieved on 23 October, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/3174/african-paradoxes>

⁷²⁹ Orobator, *Theological Reimagination*, p. 9.

The essays in the book *Theological Reimagination: Conversations on Church, Religion and Society in Africa* resulted from an experience of African *palaver* that doubled as a theological research project. *Theological Reimagination* depicted the central task of the African theologians who gathered in conversation about church, religion and society. Whether as *palaver* or *ubuntu* the theological enterprise operates as a collaborative effort regulated by the communicative ethics of mutual listening and respective dialog.”⁷³⁰

As we continue to explore different aspects of African contextual theology many challenges remain. One is to dig deeper into the African meaning of *palaver* and give it more universal respectability. That it continues to be used in the current literature is significant. In the “Foreword” to *Endless Quest*, the 2014 Festschrift in honor of Laurenti Magesa, Aylward Shorter writes: “[Magesa] has remained in touch with ordinary Catholics through his continuous pastoral work. He practices – it has been said – a conversational theology, ‘a palaver theology’ that uses a story-telling method.”⁷³¹

There are similar “*palaver*” and “conversation” words in African culture. *Indaba* is a term that comes from a Zulu, South Africa word meaning "business" or "matter" and is equivalent to *palaver*. The term has found widespread use throughout Southern Africa and often simply means “gathering” or “meeting.” There are *indaba* groups in traditional African culture where people get together to sort out the problems that affect them all, where everyone has a voice and where there is an attempt to find a common mind or a common story that everyone is able to tell when they go away. It is along the lines of: “This is how we approached it.” “This is what we heard.” “This is where we arrived as we prayed and thought and talked and conversed together.”

Anglican Church conversation leading to consensus. **ADD**

This is related to *Ubuntu* that has its origin in the Bantu languages of southern Africa such as Zulu. It describes a South African ethic or humanist philosophy that focuses on people's allegiances and relations with each other – the essence of being human. It can be variously translated as “togetherness” or “interconnectedness” or “interdependence” or “humanity” or “humanness.” It expresses the African saying *I am because we are*.

The Swahili word *baraza* refers to both the meeting place and the meeting/conversation itself.⁷³²

⁷³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷³¹ Aylward Shorter, “Foreword,” *Endless Quest*, p. ii.

⁷³² One has to be very careful in research and proper usage. Our African Proverbs Working Group, especially Don Sybertz, discovered that the Sukuma, Tanzania word *susu* is similar to *palaver*. Tanzanian Augustinian priest Zakaria Kashinje states:

The proper word for discussion in using parables in Sukuma is *susu* meaning “talking by using parables” or *mahoya ga jigemelo* that means “talking with examples.” Some say *mahoya ga jigano* that in Swahili is *maongezi ya kutumia hadithi* and in English means “talking by using riddles and examples.” It is also correct to use the word *gwiganila* that means “talking by using riddles.” However, all in all, *susu* includes all these words such as

Orobator further explores “African Theology as Conversation” in the book *Practicing Reconciliation, Doing Justice, Building Peace: Conversations in Catholic Theological Ethics in Africa*. The subtitle of the book is, in itself, significant. He states:

From the perspective of methodology, the format of the initial CTEWC [Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church] seminar took the shape of conversation – women and men, lay and religious, clerics and ecclesiastics, young and old – who asked and explored proving questions, cleared new paths and articulated viable options. A critical component of this approach is the readiness to listen to and to learn from one another. The setting of the seminar recalled the African *palaver* model of dialog and consensus in addressing pertinent theological and ethical issues. This conversation was led by newer African scholars in dialog with established scholars and ecclesial leaders [including three bishops].⁷³³

He expands this conversational theological methodology by saying:

Strong, dynamic currents are shaping the flow of theological discourse in Africa. A unique characteristic of this discourse is the widening circle of conversation partners. African theologians no longer content themselves with talking to like-minded theologians; they engage bishops, civil society groups and government representatives as conversational partners in a rational dialog and critical analysis within society and in the [Catholic] Church. This conversational methodology breaks new ground in theological scholarship in Africa and represents a new way of doing theology in which collaboration and conversation win over confrontation and adversarial positions. The result is a process of mutual listening and learning, a vital ingredient for constructing

talking by using parables and riddles as well as examples. Therefore, Father Donald Sybertz got it correct by using the word *susu* from his deep research that did with some of the Sukuma elders.

Zakaria Kashinje, in an email to the author, 9 October, 2107.

The pronunciation of the Sukuma word *susu* has two meanings. When the tones are equal/even it means “conversation.” When it is tonal with the accent on the second syllable it means “chicks,” the children of a chicken.

But later we learned that *susu* also means “shit” in Sheng, the popular street language in Kenya.

Back to the drawing board.

⁷³³ Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator (ed.), *Practicing Reconciliation, Doing Justice, Building Peace: Conversations in Catholic Theological Ethics in Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2013, p. 20.

what veteran African theologian Elochukwu Uzukwu designates “the listening church.”⁷³⁴

Tanzanian Jesuit theologian Father Gabriel Mnassi, SJ offers additional insights as he links palaver and SCCs.

The formation of Small Christian Communities as the model of the Church in Eastern Africa is a direct response to particular realities as well an interpretation of the teachings of Vatican II: it is a move *from* the Church that understands itself first and foremost as the hierarchy and the clergy to a community in which the role of these two (hierarchy and the clergy) are challenged to focus mainly on offering leadership, that is, stimulate, encourage and strengthen the exercise of the many gifts of the Spirit in every Christian community and devise a way of enforcing them practically. In this model, the Word of God enjoys a prominent place for the following reasons: first, as one of the principle elements constituting the church; second, as a direct reflection of the *palaver* model of being Church; third, in a Church where a good size of community, initially unable to participate in the life of the Church in any meaningful way because of its condition of life, is offered a viable alternative.⁷³⁵ In words of Dieudonné M. Ngona, “the Word of God is among the prominent characteristics of the Small Christian Communities.”⁷³⁶

Pope Francis offers an interesting insight into this process of listening and learning from one another as we experience the richness of diversity: “It is important to remember Aparecida [2009 meeting in Brazil], the method of gathering diversity together. Not so much a diversity of ideas in order to produce a document, but a variety of experiences of God, in order to set a vital process in motion.”⁷³⁷

There is a connection between African Christian *Palaver* Theology, African Christian Theology as Conversation and African Christian Narrative Theology. They are part of each other. They form a union. One type of inculturation theology is an African narrative theology of inculturation. The starting part is African culture, but specifically African oral literature and the wide range of narrative and oral forms: proverbs, sayings, riddles, stories, myths, plays, and songs explained in their historical and cultural contexts. These oral forms especially proverbs and sayings are a very natural and very popular form of African *palaver*, conversation and speech. There is a famous Igbo, Nigeria saying *Proverbs are the palm oil*

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

⁷³⁵ George N. Gichuhu, *The Spirituality of SCCs in Eastern Africa*, pp. 51-55. Of note here is the ability to worship even in absence of the Eucharistic Celebration; also, the ability of instantaneous prayers by the participants in these gatherings.

⁷³⁶ Gabriel Mnassi, “*Palaver: A Challenge for African Church Leadership*,” Jesuit School of Theology of Santa Clara University, California, USA: Conference on Theology: Local Ecclesiologies in Dialog, 2009, Santa Clara: Unpublished Paper.

⁷³⁷ Francis, “Francis' Address to Bishops [of Brazil],” 27 July, 2013, in an email message from the *Zenit Daily Dispatch*, 27 July, 2013.

with which words are eaten. They are a way of life for SCC members especially on the local level.

Kenyan theologian Sister Anne Nasimiyu, LSOSF states: "The oral literature of the African people is their unwritten *Bible*. This religious wisdom is found in African idioms, wise sayings, legends, myths, stories, proverbs and oral history."⁷³⁸ Kenyan theologian John Mbiti adds: "Proverbs are a rich source of African Religion and philosophy. They contain and point to a deep spirituality, as well as theological and philosophical insights. In this case they form a bridge between traditional African religiosity and biblical teaching."⁷³⁹

Waliggo states:

Our [African] theological style is very concerned with narrative, expressing teachings in story. Our people listen better when you give them a story. This means using local expressions and rituals, linking the gospel to their story. Everything is brought into the story, the animals, the plants, the whole environment. It's a way of doing theology that almost dead in the West, but it's very biblical.⁷⁴⁰

American theologian and storyteller John Shea and others⁷⁴¹ have popularized Story Theology, but Narrative Theology is broader and more inclusive of all narrative forms.⁷⁴² This is a relatively new type of African theology. Ghanaian theologian Bishop John Pobee states:

The urgent task is the collection of myths, proverbs, invocations, prayers, incantations, ritual, songs, dreams and so on. The collections made so far are rather haphazard and are part of sociological and anthropological

⁷³⁸ Anne Nasimiyu-Wasike, "Feminism and African Theology," *African Christian Studies*, 9, 2 (June, 1993), p. 22.

⁷³⁹ John Mbiti, "Children Confer Glory On a Home," *Draft Introduction to African Proverbs Series*, Burgdorf: Unpublished Paper, 1993, p. 2.

⁷⁴⁰ John Waliggo in an interview with John Allen, "An African Perspective," *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, 14 July, 2006. NCR Website, retrieved on 2 July, 2017, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/all-things-catholic/african-perspective>

⁷⁴¹ See John Shea, *Stories of God: An Unauthorized Biography* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1978) and *Stories of Faith* (Chicago: Thomas More Press, 1980). See also books by John Aurelio, William Bausch, Frederick Buechner, John Dominic Crossan, Anthony de Mello, Joseph Donders, John Dunne, John Navone, Basil Pennington, Terrence Tilley and Elie Wiesel. William Bausch is a diocesan priest from St Mary's Parish, Colts Neck, Trenton Diocese, New Jersey, USA who always uses at least three stories per homily integrated with the scripture themes.

⁷⁴² Narrative forms of theology are also found in the novels, short stories, plays, and poetry of African writers. It is significant that the novels and plays of the Nigerian writers Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka contain many African proverbs and sayings.

studies. We are asking for the specific theological mind to be brought to bear on the vast materials of the sources of African Traditional Religion.⁷⁴³

Various books of stories, myths, parables, proverbs, sayings, riddles, and other types of African oral literature, the art and symbols, and grassroots experiences are part of the rich cultural history and contemporary praxis of the people of Africa. Mbiti points out that

African oral theology is a living reality. We must come to terms with it. We must acknowledge its role in the total life of the church. It is the most articulate expression of theological creativity in Africa. This form of theology gives the church a certain measure of theological selfhood and independence.⁷⁴⁴

Many oral theology sources come from the African *palaver* and African conversation experience. Proverb conversations and story-telling feed into the open-endedness of *palaver*. These sources are theological raw materials for local African theologians to follow up on. The gems of the culture and the experience of the African people continue to be shaped and honed. African proverbs, stories and other types of oral literature are like diamonds that need theologians and others to cut and polish more incisively to display their richness and beauty. Speaking specifically of the stories and examples in *Towards an African Narrative Theology* Magesa states this book can be "a stimulus for many other works in this line."⁷⁴⁵ So we can make a link between the African *palaver* and African conversation in small groups/small communities and the emergence of proverb theology and story-telling theology.

Another dimension of African Narrative Theology as part of African Christian Theology can be found in Magesa's essay, "Endless Quest: The Vocation of an African Christian Theologian," in a book by the same name. His personal theological journey in Africa and the stories connected with it could be described as autobiographical narrative theology. He places his and other theologians' experience in an African context:

Jesus' practical oneness with humanity, his solidarity with the everyday life of the people "in the village," as Efoe Julien Penoukou put it, is the point. Here Jesus is seen as one with the people: he walks with them, knows everyone of them, and is concerned about their successes and failures. As an Ancestor, he can be reached when people need him. Many of the relational qualities of this Jesus of the village, the Elder Brother and Proto-Ancestor of humanity, were incarnated by theologians, albeit imperfectly, by persons who embodied the spirit of human solidarity from different parts of

⁷⁴³ John Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), p. 21.

⁷⁴⁴ John Mbiti, "Cattle Are Born With Ears, Their Horns Grow Later: Towards an Appreciation of African Oral Theology" in *All African Lutheran Consultation on Christian Theology and Christian Education for the African Context* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1978), 49-50.

⁷⁴⁵ Laurenti Magesa in Healey and Sybertz, *Towards an African*, p. 377.

the world. So African Theology became also narrative, bio- or auto-biographical theology.⁷⁴⁶

In explaining the methodology and process of the *Practicing Reconciliation, Doing Justice, Building Peace: Conversations in Catholic Theological Ethics in Africa* seminar and book mentioned above, Orobator states:

Reconciliation, justice, and peace concern concrete situations that affect the continent... Instead of simply enunciating principles and creating scenarios, theological ethics has a narrative task: to give voice to the stories of victims and articulate in uncompromising terms the gospel virtues and the principles of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) that offer hope of redress and healing.⁷⁴⁷

Orobator also points out that a useful lesson on the nature and method of theological reflection in Africa emphasizes the necessity of taking experience (an inductive starting point) and context seriously. This means

repositioning theological reflection within the context of community called church and the wider society. Consequently, it becomes clear that it is not enough to theologize exclusively on the basis of the intellectual acumen of the theologian, while he or she comfortably ensconces himself or herself in the protected milieu of academia. “The work of theologizing,” or, according to Tutu, the “exhilarating business” of theological reflection, must spring from the forthright observation and experience of the situation in the life of the believing community wherein echoes the strong but gentle wind of the Spirit.⁷⁴⁸

Nigerian theologian Afe Adogame points out that an important element of “doing theology” in Africa today is a dialog that is not confined to the seminary or the academy. African churches offer spaces of dialog that are empowering in themselves:

They engage in theological reflection with grassroots men, women and even children in *Bible* study groups, house-cell fellowships,⁷⁴⁹ seminars and workshops. Thus African churches, through their numerous programs based on the specific socio-cultural and political contexts in which they operate, are developing, writing and accessing a theology of their own.⁷⁵⁰

⁷⁴⁶ Laurenti Magesa, *Endless Quest*, pp.18-19.

⁷⁴⁷ Orobator, *Practicing Reconciliation*, p. 20.

⁷⁴⁸ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, “The Sky is Wide Enough: A Historical-Critical Appraisal of Theological Activity and Method in Africa,” *Hekima Review*, 40 (May, 2009), page 41.

⁷⁴⁹ The Anglican (Episcopalian) name for SCCs.

⁷⁵⁰ Afe Adogame in *African Theology on the Way: Current Conversations*. Edited by Diane Stinton (London: SPCK International Study Guide 46, 2010), 170.

This shift away from the theology of the Academy, of the Library, of the Ivory Tower, and “Laboratory Theology” to African contextual theology on the grassroots, to lay people involved in the “local community as theologian” is significant. The emphasis is on praxis not principles.

South African Redemptorist Bishop Kevin Dowling, CSSR of Rustenburg Diocese describes contextual theology in South Africa as "doing theology at the coal face," that is, the dialog on grassroots issues with people on the local level such as coal miners and day laborers. This means listening to victims of systemic violence and reflecting on the structural causes of poverty, war and violence.⁷⁵¹

Doing participatory theology with local people on the ground such as SCC members can lead to practical, pastoral solutions. Ugandan theologian John Waliggo calls this “contextual theologies from below.” Kalilombe call this “doing theology at the grassroots.”⁷⁵² It involves ordinary people who are not professional or specialist theologians. Members of the believing community actively engage in reflecting on their faith in the context of their everyday life. Following the “See,” “Judge” and “Act” methodology, people use social analysis and the light of the Gospel to transform society. They take responsibility in making their faith bear fruit on the challenges of their personal life and their mission in society. The less formally educated reflect upon and give relevant shape to their faith commitment and then search for appropriate ways of putting it into practice. In this communitarian theology they question the *status quo* and work to change it.

Nigerian Scripture Scholar Sister Teresa Okure, SHCJ emphasizes the importance of African women theologians’ dialog with people on the grassroots. When someone described Teresa’s own method or process of reading the *Bible* with people who were not *Bible* experts (especially circles of African laywomen who connect the *Bible* to daily life) as “marketplace hermeneutics,”⁷⁵³ she considered it the “highest compliment” because this was the very method that Jesus used.

An interesting Case Study of how an African theologian has helped to develop the theology of SCCs is described as follows: In June, 2011 I lived at Father Michael Kirwen, MM’s house near Langata, Nairobi, Kenya while participating in an AMECEA Meeting at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). Another house guest was Father Laurenti Magesa who was teaching in the Tangaza Maryknoll Centre for African Studies (TAMCAS) that was formerly the Maryknoll Institute of African Studies (MIAS) at the Tangaza University College. At the time I was writing this present book that eventually became *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications – CUEA Press Double *Spearhead* Nos.

⁷⁵¹ See Ellen Teague, “Bishop Kevin Dowling: How Do I Tell the Poor that God Loves Them?,” Independent Catholic News (ICN) Website, 29 June, 2014, retrieved on 27 September, 2014, <http://www.indcatholicnews.com/news.php?viewStory=25048>

⁷⁵² This theological method is described at length in Patrick Kalilombe, *Doing Theology at the Grassroots: Theological Essays from Malawi*, Gweru: Mambo Press. 1999.

⁷⁵³ Also called “local community hermeneutics.”

199-200 (2012). 163 pages. The Digital Version updated as of 23 May, 2022 is 1630 pages and is available as a free Ebook on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at: [Microsoft Word - 11 March 2022 version of Building the Church as Family of God \(smallchristiancommunities.org\)](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org)

I would write drafts of the theological sections of this book in the early morning and then discuss them with Laurenti in the late afternoon. It was a stimulating and enriching experience of theological conversation and dialog – what we now frequently call African Palaver Theology or Baraza Theology. Laurenti explained that the starting point is the grassroots experiences themselves. Then the theologian reflects on them and articulates them in a more systematic theological way. Laurenti suggested a process in which I would describe specific Small Christian Communities (SCCs) activities, events and case studies – a kind of summary of SCCs praxis on the grassroots, local level. Afterwards he would theologize on these experiences. We discussed both the theological implications and the practical applications. We were really using the steps in the Pastoral Spiral (better known as the Pastoral Circle). Then I would enter the fruit of our conversations in the updated draft of my book the next day.

To take a specific example, we discussed the growth and justice and peace outreach of SCCs in Eastern Africa in the last 10 years. SCCs have been actively involved in reconciliation in Kenya after the 2008 post-election violence both within individual SCCs and as part of wider reconciliation services and ceremonies especially due to the annual Kenyan Lenten Campaign. The use of the "See," "Discern" and "Act" Process/Methodology of the Pastoral Spiral made a significant difference in helping to analyze the local situation and to decide on practical solutions. Magesa theologized on these new justice and peace outreaches of SCCs in Kenya (presented earlier in this chapter and in Chapter Five). For example, he took the SCCs Case Study on "Reconciliation between the Kalenjin and Kikuyu" that used a *palaver* style of conversation, discussion and dialog to resolve local problems (found on page 96) to develop elements of an African Theology of Reconciliation and Peace.

Both this current praxis and our discussions led me to refocus the aim of my SCCs Seminar at Hekima University College to read: "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."

Laurenti's ideas and insights on SCCs have added immensely to this present book. In the "Acknowledgements" Section on page 5 I state: "This book is a team effort, a community effort. Many, many people have contributed anecdotes, data, documents, examples, experiences, ideas, insights, quotations, resources, statistics, stories and suggestions as seen in the extensive list of names in the "Bibliography" and "Index." I mention...The African theologians who have articulated the theological framework for this new model of church from the bottom up."⁷⁵⁴

I continue to add to the online version of this book that has now reached 589 pages. I did a "Search" in this book for "Magesa" and found 66 matches. As a tribute to Magesa's 40 years of priesthood and his professional career as an African theologian I presented some of

⁷⁵⁴ Page 5 of the online Digital Version of the book on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website retrieved on 5 June, 2013, http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf

his ideas and insights on Small Christian Communities in an article published in the *Festschrift* (special volume) for Professor Laurenti Magesa called *The Endless Quest: The Vocation of an African Christian Theologian* edited by Jesse Mugambi and published by Acton Publishers in Nairobi in 2014.

Another interesting Case Study of African Palaver Theology/African Theology as Conversation on the grassroots, local level was the time when the author was asked to prepare the Homily Notes for the "Weekly Reflections for the 2012-2013 Election Year" inspired by the *Bible* Readings of each Sunday in the "Yes, Kenya Matters Campaign" that was a new online resource to promote civic education before the Kenya General Election in March, 2013. These reflections were circulated by the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission (JPIC) Commission of the Religious Superiors Conference of Kenya (RSCK) free every week for personal prayer, homilies and SCC meetings.

I could have prepared these notes in the traditional way –by myself and using commentaries, biblical exegesis, etc. Instead I prepared these notes in an African *palaver*/conversation way with members of my St. Kizito Small Christian Community (SCC) in the Waruku Section of St. Austin's Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya. Eight of us (six men and two women) first read the three Sunday Reading ourselves. Then we met together to read and reflect especially on the First Reading and the Gospel. Then we applied the readings to our daily life and local Kenyan context. In the process we theologized – what Schreiter called "the local community as theologian." Our secretary wrote a draft of our reflections. Then we revised it. A summary of these Homily Notes is as follows:

The first example is the **FIFTH SUNDAY OF EASTER (B) 6 May 2012**⁷⁵⁵

1. Readings:

Acts 9:26-31

I John 3:18-24

John 15:1-8



2. Scripture Focus/Biblical Reflection

- Let us make our home in Jesus Christ as he makes his home in us. As disciples of Christ we must remain in him as His words remain in us. We are branches united with God in Christ Jesus.
- God is love. We should love one another as we are all God's creation.
- If we are united in Jesus Christ we will see people from other ethnic groups (tribes) in Kenya as our brothers and sisters.
- The peace of the Risen Christ brings healing. We should embrace forgiveness and reconciliation in order to bear more fruit.

⁷⁵⁵ Published on the Christ the Teacher Parish, Kenyatta University Website
<http://www.kucatholic.or.ke>

3. Link with Catholic Social Teaching (CST)

- “Elections represent a platform for the expression of a people’s political decisions, and they are a sign of legitimacy for the exercise of power. They provide a privileged opportunity for healthy and serene public political debate, marked by respect for different opinions and different political groupings. If conducted well, elections call forth and encourage real and active participation by citizens in political and social life. Failure to respect the national constitution, the law or the outcome of the vote, when elections have been free, fair and transparent, would signal a grave failure in governance and a lack of competence in the administration of public affairs” (Number 81 in *Africa’s Commitment*).
- Small Christian Communities are "Living (or Vital) Christian Communities committed to living Christ's love for everybody, a love which transcends the limits of natural solidarity of clans, tribes or other interest groups" (Number 89 in *The Church in Africa*).
- “We have experienced that a properly trained and led SCC adds great value to the promotion of reconciliation. This is because deeper biblical reflection and more regular use of the Pastoral Circle empower our Christians to engage effectively in the social life around them. Here formation in Catholic Social Teaching (CST) at all levels must be a priority” (AMECEA Statement).
- “It can be helpful for you to form associations in order to continue shaping your Christian conscience and supporting one another in the struggle for justice and peace. The Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and the ‘new communities’ are fundamental structures for fanning the flame of your Baptism” (Number 131 in *Africa’s Commitment*).
- “Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully apply 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” (No. 6 in *Justice in the World*, 1971 World Synod of Bishops).

4. Yes, Kenya Matters (Kenyan Life Focus)

- 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 to promote civic education on the local level.
- We should encourage the equal distribution of resources in Kenya.

5. Questions for Reflection and Sharing

- How can you participate in the next General Election as an individual/Small Christian Community/Community?
- What is your role to ensure peaceful elections as an individual/Small Christian Community/Community?
- In the light of the Gospel how can we promote forgiveness and reconciliation in Kenya in order to bear more fruit?
- What can we do to bring about peace and unity in our families, communities and country of Kenya?

6. African Wisdom

- In the light of the Gospel there is the African story “God Is like a Large Baobab Tree:” “One day my pick-up truck broke down. After I waited for half an hour, a big Coca-Cola lorry came by and the driver, a Muslim named Musa, kindly towed my vehicle to the next town. While we drove into town I sat in his big cab and we talked about, of all things, religion. In commenting on the tensions between Christians and Muslims in East Africa, he said, ‘There is only one God. God is like a large baobab tree with different branches that represent the different religions of Islam, Christianity, African Religion and so forth. These branches are part of the same family of God so we should work together.’ Simply put, Musa taught me a wonderful African metaphor for world religions and interreligious dialog.”⁷⁵⁶
- “One finger does not kill a louse.”
- “Unity is strength, division is weakness.”
- “If you live in a glass house don’t throw stones.”

A similar example is the **THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT (C) 3 March 2013**⁷⁵⁷

1. Readings:

Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15;
I Corinthians 10:1-6, 10-12;
Luke 13:1-9

2. Life Situation:



In Kenya we are in the middle of the 2013 Lenten campaign to prepare for the general elections tomorrow, Monday, 4 March, 2013. 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.

Photo of Maasai woman voting in 2007 election from the *Daily Nation*

⁷⁵⁶ Joseph Healey, “God is Like A Large Baobab Tree,” African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 22 May, 2017, <http://www.afriprov.org/african-stories-by-season/10-christian-values/55-god-is-like-a-large-baobab-tree.html>. Also reprinted in *Current Issues in Prayer*, May 2017, retrieved on 22 May, 2017, http://www.laikos.org/Fr1_Int_May_2017.pdf

⁷⁵⁷ Published as “Weekly Reflections for THIRD SUNDAY OF LENT (C) 3 March 2013” in *Yes Kenya Matters Series* on the Christ the Teacher Parish, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya Website. 2 pages. <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> and on Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) Website. 2 pages. <http://www.maryknollogc.org/resources/Scripture/third-sunday-lent>

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

3. Scripture Focus/Biblical Reflection:

- In the first reading Moses experiences God in the desert especially in the burning bush. Today do we experience God in the “other” – the person from another ethnic group (tribe)? The person of another color or sex or race or religion? Are we open to meeting Jesus “in disguise:” in an economically poor person; in a person with less education or wealth than we have; and in various outsiders/marginated people in our society?
- Research indicates that 75 percent of the members of Small Christian Communities in Nairobi Archdiocese are women. In interviews Catholic women 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. But in the SCCs we feel that we women are equals and have a voice.”
- In the Gospel Jesus uses the parable of the fig tree that helps us reflect on repentance, reform and renewal during this Lenten season. Are we cultivating our personal and communal “ground,” that is, our simple lifestyle, our good habits, our balanced attitudes, our reaching out to needy people? Or do we tend to be judgmental, promote stereotypes and give labels to other people? Are we using the good fertilizer of prayer, fasting and almsgiving during this Lenten season to change and deepen our lives? Then we will bear the good fruits of community, equality, justice, listening, peace, serenity and silence in our personal and communal lives.

4. Pastoral Resources

The 2013 Kenyan Lenten campaign offers us a special opportunity to use many concrete pastoral resources during this 50th anniversary of the Second Vatican Council, this Year of Faith and in the spirit of the New Evangelization:

- *Africa’s Commitment (Africae Munus):* Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation from the 2009 Second African Synod on “Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.”
- *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace)
- *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* (commonly known by the Latin title *Gaudium et Spes*)

The opening words of this last document – “The joys and the hopes, the griefs and the anxieties of the men [people] of this age, especially those who are poor or in any way afflicted, these are the joys and hopes, the griefs and anxieties of the followers of Christ”

– is a permanent challenge to the Catholic Church’s self-understanding as a community in mission.

5. Yes, Kenya Matters (Kenyan Life Focus)

- In this 2013 calendar year the African continent will have general elections in Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Tunisia and Zimbabwe. *The New York Times* describes multiparty democracy in Africa as “messy and unpredictable.” But with the help of God and the determination and active endurance of the African people we shall succeed.
- Kenyans marveled at how after the U.S. presidential debates the candidates and their families could shake hands, embrace and talk warmly with each other. A major challenge in Kenya and throughout Africa is that political candidates should sacrifice their pride, desires and ambitions and be good losers if they don’t win the election. An important ----- Swahili (Eastern and Central Africa) proverb applies to elections in Africa: “The person who cannot accept defeat is not a competitor.” The test and maturity of democracy and ongoing good governance in Africa is for the losers to openly accept the results of the public vote (“the voice of the people”).

As we evaluate the above examples of African *Palaver* Theology/African Theology as Conversation we can ask. Is this African? Yes. Is this *Palaver* or Conversation? Yes. Is this Theology? Yes, but in a new way. This is not the traditional classical theology of a science, of a systematic presentation of definitions, theses and propositions, of catalogued truths. This is the lived theology of African SCC members, especially lay people on the grassroots level. This is the lived experience of the Christian Churches in the light of God’s Word.

Narrative Theology from below. Examples from Latin American literature and grassroots storytelling. **ADD**

As I travel around I am always listening, taking notes and learning. In visiting Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish South B, Nairobi, Kenya the Pastor Father Martin Onyango K’owacho, MAfr said that at present the two main problems in SCCs are:

1. Men and youth are not involved. He feels there is an over-emphasis on the prayer side of SCCs (such as the weekly *Bible* Sharing and *Bible* Reflection) that attracts women, but not men. Solutions are first, to connect the *Bible* to our concrete, practical daily life. Men would like to discuss what the Gospel says about the economy, ethnicity and corruption. Second, more emphasis more practical action and outreach including SCC projects. This would help pull the men in.
2. Priests remain too central to the life and development of the SCCs. When a priest visits a SCC this makes it more important. Constant animation can wear the priests out especially if they are too controlling.

Onyango feels that SCCs training workshops can help overcome these problems.⁷⁵⁸

⁷⁵⁸ Martin K’owacho, conversation with the author, Nairobi, Kenya, 19 March, 2016.

7. Evaluation of the Impact of SCCs in the AMECEA Region

We can be proud of the achievement of SCCs in the nine AMECEA countries. In commenting on the pastoral relevance and social effectiveness of SCCs in Eastern Africa, Orobator says that “SCCs offer the most viable models and means for the church in Africa to become real, relevant and local in the lives of ordinary Christians.”⁷⁵⁹ Some concrete examples of the impact of SCCs in the AMECEA Region:

a. Parish-based SCCs are integrated in the pastoral structures and activities of the Catholic Church. SCCs are an official pastoral structure, an official ecclesial structure in the Church in Eastern Africa church. Archbishop Protase Rugambwa emphasizes that “we need to always think of SCCs as relevant pastoral structures that foster the work of evangelization.”⁷⁶⁰ In other words, SCCs are a pastoral model that helps to build the parish structures:

i. Leadership structures. SCCs are directed represented on the outstation, sub-parish and parish councils/parish pastoral councils. This is participation and representation from below, from the grassroots.

There is a Case Study in Nairobi, Kenya where a woman member of St. Jude SCC is the representative on the Olympic Subparish Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission. In turn, she is the subparish’s representative on the Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission. One of her tasks is to inform and animate SCC members on the process of the annual Kenya Lenten Campaign that usually focuses on justice and peace issues, and most recently on promoting reconciliation in Kenya. This is two-way communications -- from the bottom to the top and from the top to the bottom. Three key insights of the Second African Synod documents are that SCCs members are “agents” of reconciliation and the SCC itself is both a “path” and a “place” of reconciliation.

ii. Celebration of the Sacraments in the SCCs themselves such as the sacraments of Baptism, Eucharist (including First Communion), Reconciliation, Marriage and Anointing of the Sick. Of particular note are SCC Masses (*Jumuiya* Masses) celebrated periodically in the homes of SCC members.⁷⁶¹ These masses take place on the annual feast of the Patron/Patroness Saint of the SCC⁷⁶², during Advent, during Lent, Baptism, First Communion, Reconciliation, Graduation, Marriage, for deceased people, Anointing, Blessing of the Seeds, Blessing of the Harvest, Special Collections, Thanksgiving, for special requests of SCC members, etc. Also SCC members participate in planning these sacraments in their outstations, subparishes and parishes.

⁷⁵⁹ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace*, p. 6.

⁷⁶⁰ Protase Rugambwa in a letter to the author, Rome, Italy, 5 December, 2013.

⁷⁶¹ Family Masses are also very popular in homes, for special intentions such as the blessing of a new home, birthday, graduation, anniversary of marriage, anniversary of death, etc. Sometimes SCC members are invited.

⁷⁶² This annual mass is an occasion to remember all the members of the SCC and their families who have died in the past year.

A good example of how SCCs are a New Pastoral Ecclesial Model of Church, a New Way of Being/Becoming Church is how the homily is given in a specific SCC Mass (*Jumuiya* Mass) in a family home of SCC members (mostly lay people) or in the neighborhood. There is a big difference between a specific SCC Mass (*Jumuiya* Mass) celebrated in a family home or in the neighborhood and a regular mass celebrated in a family home or in the neighborhood. In a specific SCC Mass the homily is different:

1. It can be a shared homily when the priest gives the first reflection and then invites the SCC members to give their own reflections.
2. Or the priest can introduce the theme of the homily and then invite SCC members to sit two by two and share their reflections with each other (in the style of buzz groups).

This topic usually provokes lively and animated discussion and debate at SCC Workshops for priests. It is generally felt that the priest should not stand up and “preach” a homily as though he was in the parish church or outstation church. One option is that he sits and facilitates a shared homily – first, he gives a short reflection on the readings himself and then invite the SCC members to share their reflections. But other priests disagree and want to follow the strict liturgical rules and regulations.

Archbishop Boniface Lele, the deceased archbishop of Mombasa Archdiocese (who died in 2014, told me: “When you give the SCCs Workshop in Mombasa please tell my priests that they should not preach in a SCC Mass in a home as though they were in a regular church.” On another occasion during a priests workshop Lele gave the opening talk and emphasized that we priests should not “preach” or give long reflections during the weekly *Bible Service* in the SCC members’ homes, but rather encourage everyone to share their reflections on the Gospel. He said that this applies to the homily as well during a SCC Mass in a home that should be a Shared Homily.

Other bishops have told me that in this kind of SCC Mass -- as the model of the church from the grassroots up in the SCC members’ homes or in the neighborhood -- everyone should be encouraged to share their reflections on the Gospel. It is important to involve the whole community. The pastoral policy in Kitui Diocese, Kenya is described as follows: “The priest or deacon does not preach or give a sermon, but participates in the sharing just like any other present member who is present. Thus, it is the entire community preaching to itself.”⁷⁶³ So, it is not up to the individual priest to decide what he wants to do. Shared homilies in SCC Masses is the pastoral policy of Kitui Diocese.

People ask how to interpret the directive in Canon Law and in the Liturgical Guidelines such as the *General Instruction to the Roman Missal* and the *Sacramentary* that only priests and deacons should preach during mass. This is clearly the norm in the Catholic Church and is intended for parish churches, outstation churches, religious institutions, etc. The authors were probably not familiar with the newer SCCs Model of Church from the grassroots, from below.

Some bishops of Kenya cite the section in *Canon Law* on “Structures” under the “People of God” about how the Particular Churches (Local Churches) have the freedom to

⁷⁶³ Catholic Diocese of Kitui Website, retrieved 11 August, 2011, <http://www.dioceseofkitui.org/subpage6.html>.

carry out pastoral work in parishes on the local level following their own structures and activities. This is described as “the ordering of the parish on the most local levels.” This means that in the local context of Eastern Africa (where SCCs are the AMECEA pastoral priority) shared homilies are appropriate for SCCs Masses in the homes of lay members or in the neighborhood. This was confirmed in a conversation with Bishop Colin Davies, MHM, the former bishop of Ngong Diocese, in Nairobi on 10 March, 2012.

iii. SCCs promote the use of the *Bible*. Many SCCs are called Lectionary-Based SCCs meaning that in their weekly meetings they use the Gospel of the following Sunday following the three-year Lectionary Cycle.⁷⁶⁴ Many SCCs in Eastern Africa use the Seven Step Gospel Sharing of Lumko as well as following the more detailed “[13 Steps in the Weekly Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection/Bible—Life Connections of Small Christian Communities \(SCCs\) in Africa](#).”⁷⁶⁵ SCC members read and reflect on the Bible in community that is emphasized by No. 86 of Pope Benedict XVI’s Apostolic Exhortation *The Word of the Lord*. Research shows that the main challenge is specifically and concretely to connect, relate and apply the Bible (Gospel) to our daily lives and experience in Africa. This is closely connected to Faith-sharing/faith reflection.

Ugandan Servite seminarian Gyavira Ntensibe, OSM reports from the SCCs in Bukuumi Parish in Hoima Diocese, Uganda:

Many families faced with some challenges find consolation in the Word of God. Members of SCCs are no longer challenged by Christians of other denominations. This is because the *Bible* has become part of them. Speaking with Mwanajumuiya Maxmila she says, “before the born-again Christians used to challenge me about the *Bible*, but with the knowledge that I have gotten about the *Bible* in my SCC, now I can also challenge them.”⁷⁶⁶

Another challenge is to use silence effectively. Many SCC members don’t know how to “listen to God” in the silent period after the reading of the Gospel. One SCC member in Tanzania admitted that during this silent period her thoughts fly far away and her head is filled with many distractions such as: “When are my children coming home from school?” “What am I going to cook for supper?” African religious especially sisters and brothers have a special ministry in helping lay people to appreciate the importance of silence.

Sometimes a learning experience can be a humorous experience as seen in this true story “Trying to Hijack Our Small Christian Community:”

⁷⁶⁴ An important resource is a *Calendar with the References to the Daily Lectionary Readings*. Some SCCs read the *Bible* every day. Some SCCs use the readings of the day in their weekly or biweekly meetings.

⁷⁶⁵ Booklets and pamphlets containing different versions of these steps are very popular and readily available. *Utaratibu wa Ibada kwa Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo* by Leodegard Massawe has had many printings.

⁷⁶⁶ Gyavira Ntensibe, “Small Christian Communities a New Way of Evangelization: A Case Study of the SCCs in Bukuumi Parish in Hoima Diocese, Uganda,,: Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2015.

We gathered for our weekly meeting of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus Small Christian Community (SCC) in St. Peter's Parish, Oysterbay, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. A young woman in her early 20s from the Charismatic Movement stood up at the beginning of the Bible Reflection Step, waved the *Bible* at the members and "preached at" our small community about the meaning of the particular Gospel passage. She went on "teaching" us for about 15 minutes. She tried to hijack our SCC by imposing her prayer style on our meeting. Later our SCC facilitator politely reminded the members that our guidelines are to: Keep seated; speak no longer than five minutes; and use a sharing, not teaching style. Later we agreed that there is a clever way to avoid this happening again. We would stop a person from going on beyond the time limit by clapping at end of five minutes -- and continue clapping until the person stopped speaking. This works!⁷⁶⁷

iv. Nurturing vocations to the priesthood, religious life and lay ministries. SCCs pray for and promote vocations among their members and have special celebrations and sending ceremonies at the different stages of commitment. Recent Case Studies indicate that an increasing number of priests, brothers and sisters attribute their vocations to the SCCs where they grew up.

v. Self-reliance. By organizing fundraising and collections through the SCC structures, money has doubled and tripled in some parishes.⁷⁶⁸ It is more efficient and effective to collect the annual church tax and other collections through the SCCs. Many dioceses organize their annual fund raising appeal by assessing each parish with a certain amount. In turn parishes assess each SCC and the overall collection is much higher. Fund raising (through *Harambees* [a Swahili word meaning "Let us pull together" used for fund-raising events], charity walks, raffles, auctions, etc.) for worthy projects in the parish such as educational needs, feeding programs, elderly programs, counseling services and new church buildings and for national campaigns such as famine relief/freedom from hunger, internally displaced persons and medical research are coordinated through the SCCs. Through SCCs on the grassroots level lay people are taking more initiative and financial responsibility for "their" church and their involvement in the wider society.

At the same time SCC members complain that there are too many collections and their SCCs have turned into funding agencies and "*Michango* (Swahili for "collections") Churches." This is a growing problem especially in Tanzania and Kenya where SCCs spend a lot of their meetings on business, especially financial, matters only. I met a SCC member in Tanzania who said if he heard there was going to be a collection at the next SCC meeting he

⁷⁶⁷ Africa Story No. 508 in the "African Stories Database", African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved on 17 August, 2011, [http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=527](http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid[0]=527)

⁷⁶⁸ In Holy Family Basilica Parish in Nairobi, Kenya in August, 2011 25 different parish associations/organizations contributed money to the Nairobi Archdiocese Family Day. St. Jude SCC and St. Francis SCC had the highest amounts.

would make sure that he was sick and couldn't attend.⁷⁶⁹ Kenyan layman Michael Orondo, the Prayer Leader of St. Kizito SCC in Nairobi Archdiocese, said that SCC members will stop coming to the weekly Bible Service if there are too many collections. He also described the "trick" of some Catholics who come to their SCC for a short time in order request a SCC collection for their Church marriage and then "disappear" after their wedding.⁷⁷⁰

After a great deal of research in Eastern Africa, our SCCs Training Team has proposed a practical solution: Have only one business meeting a month where finances and collections are discussed. The other meetings are for weekly Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection and for pastoral and social issues. As an example, the *Constitution* of St. John the Evangelist SCC in St. John the Baptist Parish, Riruta, Nairobi, Kenya states: "In addition to the weekly meeting for prayers and *Bible* discussion there will be a monthly meeting held every third Sunday of the month as an open forum for members to discuss matters affecting the SCC."

b. The SCC Model of living together, joint prayer and reflection and other activities in common is used in our major seminaries, theological institutes and formation houses in Eastern Africa.⁷⁷¹ Seminarians are divided into small sharing groups with saints' names,⁷⁷² often according to the dormitories or residence halls or hostels or houses that they live in. In 2008 the AMECEA Office in Nairobi conducted a survey⁷⁷³ on how Catholic Major Seminaries and Institutes of Theology in the nine AMECEA Countries in Eastern Africa are implementing the resolution of the 2002 AMECEA Study Conference quoted on page 24 above. The survey was sent to 22 major seminaries and institutes of theology and the AMECEA Office received 17 answers that represent a 78% return -- well above the normal

⁷⁶⁹ American Maryknoll Sister Peg Donovan, MM reports from Sengerema, Mwanza, Tanzania: "Here in our parish the JNNKs are mostly 'fund raisers' and not spiritually enriching." Message on Facebook dated 23 May, 2012.

⁷⁷⁰ Michael Orondo in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 21 April, 2013.

⁷⁷¹ It is significant that a Kenyan Catholic layman, Alphonse Omolo from Kisumu, was one of the first to stress the importance of courses on SCCs in our major seminaries in Eastern Africa – at an International SCCs Conference at the University of Notre Dame, Indiana in USA in 1991.

⁷⁷² Sometimes the same saints name are used year after year, for example, the Passionists Formation House in Nairobi has seminarian SCCs of Saints Gabriel, Gemma and Charles Lwanga. Some Formation Houses choose other names such as: Team 1, 2, 3, 4 (Missionaries of Africa Formation House in Nairobi, Kenya); particular charisms/interests/tasks such as Hospitality Group, Mission Group and Networking/Justice and Peace Group (Comboni Formation House in Nairobi, Kenya); and holy people in the congregation or society like Servant of God Vincent McCauley and Servant of God Pat Peyton (Holy Cross Formation House in Nairobi, Kenya).

⁷⁷³ The full results of the survey can be found in Joseph 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. 24-26.

average for these kinds of surveys.⁷⁷⁴ The survey results stated: “Many seminarians live in some kind of Small Christian Community structure/set-up in the Residence Halls/Dormitories/Hostels/Houses of the seminaries and institutes that includes regular prayer, masses, shared reflections and apostolic activities.”⁷⁷⁵

The three Catholic seminaries in Zambia have a well-organized and coordinated formation plan through the SCCs. The Spiritual Year takes place at the Emmaus Spirituality Center in Lusaka. This priest has an important role in the formation and advancement of the seminarians in his SCC (following the external forum). Each SCC has its own identity. The daily life and many activities and responsibilities revolve around the five SCCs. Each week there is mass, prayers, rosary and Faith-sharing in the SCCs. SCC members sit together in the dining hall. Cleaning the compound, serving in the dining hall, and cleaning-up after meals is done on a rotational basis. The Sunday Eucharist is organized by a different SCC each week. Zambian Sulpician priest Father Timothy Chikweto, SS explains:

Seminarians at Emmaus are divided into SCCs in order to enhance the quality of formation. Currently in the 2013-2014 Academic Year there are five SCCs namely St. Anne, St. Augustine, St. John, St. Jude and St. Nicholas. These are groups of eight to 10 seminarians, depending on the total number of seminarians in a given intake. Each SCC has a moderator who is a member of staff and is the immediate supervisor as well as the principal formator for the group. The moderator is also the chief evaluator and recommender of the members of his small group.

From among themselves the SCC members elect for themselves a Chairperson/Facilitator, a Liturgist and a Works Minister. The chairperson facilitates the general life of the group; the liturgist takes of prayer and liturgical life; and the Works Minister organizes the group around community chores. Members of an SCC live in close proximity. They have a designated meeting for mass (once a week), Faith-sharing/Bible sharing (once a week), and liturgy preparation (once a week). SCCs take up weekly chores (such as cleaning ablution blocks and serving in the dining room within the larger

⁷⁷⁴ In answering this survey Ugandan theologian Father Pius Male Ssentumbwe and Director of the AMECEA Pastoral Institute (Gaba) in Eldoret, Kenya stated: “A great challenge today is to invigorate the SCCs so that they are seen not only as means of strengthening Christian families referred to as the Domestic Church, but also as a means of integral development and holistic evangelization.”

⁷⁷⁵ We celebrated a *Jumuiya* [Swahili for “Community”] Mass in *Kwetu Kwenu* (“For Us and You Too”) Hostel at Hekima University College in Nairobi on Easter Monday, 24 March, 2008. This was part of the regular Monday and Thursday masses in the college’s small communities of eight to 10 students. For this mass the Jesuit seminarians came from Burundi, Cameroon, DRC, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, Tanzania and Zambia. The Shared Homily was linked to the Prayer of the Faithful (General Intercessions). I mentioned some Sukuma, Tanzania cultural examples that illuminate and enrich our Easter faith such as the Sukuma name for Jesus Christ – “Victor over Death.”

community on a rotational basis. The same applies to taking responsibility at mass and other liturgical activities.⁷⁷⁶

^The same overall plan continues during the two years of philosophy in St. Augustine's Major Seminary in Mpima in Kabwe Diocese.

The four years of theology take place in St. Dominic's Major Seminary in Lusaka. In the 2013-2014 Academic Year there were 13 SCCs consisting of 11 seminarians each. Each SCC had a priest-formator advisor. The SCCs are named after saints and special Zambian holy people. SCC members meet three times a week: Monday for sharing; Tuesday for a SCC mass when the seminarians give the homily on a rotation basis; and Thursday for Morning Prayers. The seminarians are very involved in local SCCs during their pastoral ministry in parishes.

The Small Christian Communities in St. Anthony's Major Seminary, Kachebere in Mchinji, Malawi are called "teams" with the staff lecturers as moderators. In the Academic year 2013-2014 the 120 students in the three years of philosophy formed eight teams of approximately 15 student each. Members of the same team live together in the resident halls and are responsible for each other, for example, if one seminarian gets sick the others look after him. They live together as a family in the spirit of openness and sharing. The teams foster the spirituality and prayer life of their members. The leaders of these eight SCCs form the Student Council of the seminary.⁷⁷⁷

Every Tuesday is SCC Day. Morning Prayers are in the different teams using *Bible Sharing*, *Lectio Divina* or the *Breviary*. From 2 – 3 p.m. the teams do community services such as cleaning the buildings and grounds of the seminary and other manual labor jobs. In the evening they discuss various religious and pastoral topics. On 10 December, 2013 I participated in Team 8's discussion on "Strengthening the Vision of our Destiny," the 1 December, 2013 Pastoral Letter of the Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM) on the May 2014 National Elections. Recently the SCCs teams discussed the 2012-2013 Year of Faith.

Other more informal activities take place during the rest of the week. The teams also do community services on Thursday afternoons. There are inter-team sports activities. They do charitable works such as visiting the sick in the hospital.⁷⁷⁸

A recent Case Study is St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary in Nairobi, Kenya. The seminarians studying theology are divided into 10 SCCs, each with its own Patron/Patroness Saint⁷⁷⁹ and Priest Adviser (from the seminary staff). These SCCs meet every Thursday night

⁷⁷⁶ Timothy Chikweto email message to the author dated 4 May, 2014.

⁷⁷⁷ See "The Proposed Constitution of the Teams -- St. Anthony's Major Seminary."

⁷⁷⁸ Summarized from conversations with Fathers Raphael Mbendera and Vincent Mwakhwawa, Mchinji, Malawi, 10 December, 2013.

⁷⁷⁹ In the first class of the SCCs courses at Hekima University College and Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya the students, mainly seminarians, divide into small communities of 8-10 students and chose a Patron/Patroness Saint to model a SCC during the semester. Over the years they have chosen various African saints as well as Servant of God

for prayer, reflection and discussion. On the third Thursday of the month there is a SCC Mass. The rector Kenyan priest Father John Oballa (now Bishop of Ngong Diocese) reported on two very positive experiences. When one of the seminarians had a fire in his home that killed two people, the 10 seminary SCCs raised 42,000 Kenyan Shillings (= \$553) as a donation. This vividly expressed the meaning of our Lenten journey of solidarity. When Morning Prayers at the seminary began to become routine and uninspired, the seminarians discussed this issue in their weekly SCCs and then started using more active and inspired prayers.⁷⁸⁰

Two other AMECEA-related examples are as follows: First is the AMECEA Pastoral Institute (API) that is part of the CUEA Gaba Campus in Eldoret, Kenya. The AMECEA Pastoral Institute (API-GABA) was established as a Catholic Pastoral Institute in 1967 in Gaba, Uganda. The institute moved to its current premises in Eldoret, Kenya in 1976. Since its beginning the institute has offered a nine month diploma Pastoral Renewal Program to lay professionals, religious men and women and clergy from the AMECEA Region and other African countries. In July, 2008 at the AMECEA Plenary in Lusaka, Zambia, the bishops elevated the institute to the level of a campus of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA). Presently the diploma courses of nine months (August to May) include:

- “Diploma in Pastoral Ministry and Management.” One course is called “Small Christian Communities: A Tool for Evangelization in AMECEA Region.”
- “Diploma in Evangelization and Catechesis.” One course is called “Ecclesial Groups and Movements.”

Student can write their Research Project and other papers on SCCs.

Renewal and Sabbatical Year participants audit 10 units from either of the diploma courses according to their areas of interest. They write three papers and are awarded a certificate.⁷⁸¹

Right from the 1970s to the present, the life of the students in this Pastoral Renewal Program is organized on the basis of SCCs. For example, in the 2011-2012 academic year the students and staff had four SCCs of 12 members each that met twice a month: St. Agnes, St. Augustine, St. Cecilia and St. Kizito.

Cardinal Maurice Otunga and Servant of God Julius Nyerere. Following the guidelines of Canon Law “Servant of God” is not used in their titles so they are called Cardinal Maurice Otunga SCC and Mwalimu Julius Nyerere SCC. It is only at the “Blessed” stage that a holy person becomes a public figure in the universal church. Kenyan Canon Lawyer Father Ferdinand Luganzo in a conversation with the author on 11 September, 2013.

⁷⁸⁰ John Oballa in conversations with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 25 and 28 March, 2011.

⁷⁸¹ See the Catholic University of Eastern Africa Gaba Campus Eldoret Website, retrieved on 11 January, 2014, <http://www.cuea.edu/gaba>.

Second is the St. Bakanja AMECEA College (BBAC) in Nairobi, Kenya (Regional Theology Seminary and House of Formation for seminarians drawn from the nine AMECEA countries who study at CUEA). The college organizes the major seminarians into four SCCs (St. Matthew, St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John) that meet on Thursdays.

Many seminarians also get good pastoral experience in the life and practice of SCCs in parishes during their seminary training especially through their weekend pastoral activities. The religious congregations and societies of Tangaza University College in Nairobi have particularly good programs. Other seminarians experience SCCs during their Pastoral Year.

A related example is integrating the SCCs Pastoral Priority in the pastoral activities of the Houses of Formation in the AMECEA Region. Many communities of women and men such as juniorates, novitiates and postulancies have their members regularly participating in the weekly meetings of the SCCs in their geographical area. This continues in the experiences of seminarians, brothers and sisters⁷⁸² in their Pastoral Years and other pastoral programs. A number of AMECEA bishops interviewed emphasize the importance of priests being introduced to SCCs in their seminary training and formation years before ordination.

The involvement of African Religious Sisters in SCCs is clearly mixed. Some sisters participate in SCCs, others do not. A good Case Study is the day and a half workshop that took place at the Assumption Sisters Novitiate in Thika, Kenya on 25-26 March, 2007. The theme was: "African Sisters as Animators of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa." A total of 18 people participated: 5 Novices, 8 Postulates, 4 Staff and one Resource Person (an Assumption Sister who does pastoral work in Kitui Diocese).

We had a lively discussion on African sisters' involvement/lack of involvement in SCCs. Often they say that they already live in a SCC, that is, their local convent so they don't have to get involved in the SCCs in their parish. But following Bishop Kalilombe's challenge, a scenario might look like this: In a particular convent one sister teaches in the primary school, one sister works in the local dispensary, one sister does pastoral work in the parish and one sister takes responsibility for the material needs of the convent itself. But all four of these sisters should be regular members of one of the parish-based neighborhood SCCs to express their commitment to this new model of church and to better experience the ordinary life of lay Catholics in the parish.

A new dimension is Pope Francis' challenge to pastoral workers to have of more direct contact with the ordinary daily life of lay people, and in particular suffering and wounded people. To use an analogy: how can African sisters smell the sheep and take on the smell/odor/lived reality of sheep. One way is through active participation in SCCs.⁷⁸³

But the number of specific workshops on SCCs for African sisters is still few.

Another Case Study is how the process of "SCCs as a New Way of Being Church" was integrated in the annual retreat of the Brothers of St. Martin de Porres in Juba, South

⁷⁸² See Francis Njuguna, "Religious Women Take a Leading Role in SCCs Programs," *National Mirror*, 1:10 (October, 2012), p. 16.

⁷⁸³ Based on the author's conversation with Kenyan Daughter of Charity Sister Teresa Nyawira, DC in Nairobi, Kenya on 28 March, 2015.

Sudan from 25-30 September, 2011. A total of 15 people participated in the retreat: 12 Sudanese St. Martin de Porres Brothers. Two Sudanese Brothers of St. Joseph, and the author. The theme was: "African Brothers: Truly African, Truly Christian" in the context of a personal journey and a communal journey in solidarity. Already the 2002 AMECEA Study Conference "recommended that a program on the theological and pastoral value of Small Christian Communities be included in the houses of formation of both men and women." So why not make this SCCs Ecclesiology and pastoral priority part of a retreat that highlights a deeper consciousness and awareness of the small community as a spirituality and a way of life. During the six days we tried to live, pray and reflect together as a small, Faith-sharing community. Some of the special features were: *Lectio Divina* reading/meditation on the *Bible*; daily shared homilies as a full group and in buzz groups of two each; daily Faith-sharing/reflection group on special topics such as: "What is my favorite Bible passage and why?" "Who Do I/We Say that Jesus Christ Is?"⁷⁸⁴ "How do I/We Feel about Painting Jesus Christ as an African?" "My/Our Identity as an African Brother;" a special SCC Mass (*Jumuiya* Mass); a Bible Service during the middle of the week when we reflected on the Gospel of the following Sunday (2 October); and communal preparation for the Sacrament of Reconciliation (with individual confession). A spirit of mission permeated the whole retreat.

A recommendation of the retreat was how the brothers can integrate the SCC priority, lifestyle and process in their various religious communities in South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda and in their pastoral ministry, for example, starting a SCC of students at the University of South Sudan in Juba.

Ngalula summarizes the overall challenge for Africa in these words:

Unfortunately there are still priests and bishops who do not understand the originality of BCCs. Instead they take them for parish extensions in the villages or for devotional groups, and they take the BCC animators for catechists. This is also due to the fact that in many African faculties of theology, there is no course on BCCs and their Ecclesiology. The clergy and the bishops of the new generation have to be empowered theologically and to embrace the theology of BCCs and the important role of the laity.⁷⁸⁵

c. Women's involvement in SCCs: General research indicates that 75% of the members of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Nairobi Archdiocese in Nairobi, Kenya are women. A 2012 research study in Our Lady Queen of Peace (OLQP) Parish, South B analyzed 392 SCC members by gender in 30 SCCs. Overall 65.3 % were women and 34.7 % were men. In the 18 SCCs in the slums 57.7 % were women and 42.3 % were men. In the 12 SCCs in the estates 84.7 % were women and 15.3 % were men.⁷⁸⁶ A woman in St. Clare SCC

⁷⁸⁴ One of the commonest Gospel texts used in homilies and religious education talks in Africa is this story of Peter's "Profession of Faith" found in all three Synoptic Gospels. Jesus' question to the Apostles, "Who do you say that I am?" is contextualized/inculturated to ask: "Who do you Africans say that I am?" "Who do you SCC members say that I am?"

⁷⁸⁵ Ngalula in Moerschbacher, *Proceedings of the International Symposium*, p. 5.

⁷⁸⁶ Abaha Tesfay Teare, *Women's Role in Small Christian*, pp. 47-49.

said: “I have neither a brother nor a sister here in Nairobi, but all my SCC members are my brothers and sisters. Therefore, when I have a problem I run to any of the SCC members for help and they are there to help me.”⁷⁸⁷

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.”⁷⁸⁸ 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.

Nigerian theologian Sister Anne Arabome, SSS points out that “the initiation and deepening of commitment to Small Christian Communities would be a natural place for women, together with men, to work out new collaborative styles of leadership, as suggested in No. 19 of the *Instrumentum Laboris* [of the Second African Synod]. Studying the Word of God and sharing this word would provide a prayerful setting for this experience of collaboration.”⁷⁸⁹ This is related to the challenge of the equality of women. A new vocabulary is emerging such as Gender Justice and Gender Equality. **CHECK TRANSITION**

American theologian Father Robert Schreiter, CPPS points out that local theologies can be constructed with the local community as theologian:

The experience of those in the Small Christian Communities who have seen the insight and power arising from the reflections of the people upon their experience and the Scriptures has prompted making the community itself the prime author of theology in local contexts. The Holy Spirit, working in and through the believing community, gives shape and expression to Christian experience. Some of these communities have taught us to read the Scriptures in a fresh way and have called the larger church back to a fidelity to the prophetic Word of God.⁷⁹⁰

He adds: “Many of the Small Christian Communities have experienced again and again the power of the Word of God as they gather to reflect upon the Scriptures.”⁷⁹¹

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷⁸⁸ “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)

⁷⁸⁹ Anne Arabome, “Women, You Are Set Free! Women and Discipleship in the Church” in Orobator, *Reconciliation, Justice and Peace*, p. 126.

⁷⁹⁰ Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985, p. 16. This book has 10 references to SCCs.

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

This is the local African Christian community theologizing.⁷⁹² Local gatherings of SCCs in Eastern Africa reflecting on their daily lives in light of the gospel can be a real theological locus or theological moment. No. 89 in St. John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *The Church in Africa* under "Living (or Vital) Christian Communities" states: "These small communities reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel." Archbishop Anselm Sanon of Bobo Dioulasso Archdiocese in Burkina Faso emphasizes that "theology becomes again a community affair. African theologians must work with and within the Christian Communities."⁷⁹³

Doing theology with local people on the ground⁷⁹⁴ can lead to practical, pastoral solutions. This helps to make theology relevant to the nitty-gritty of daily life and a very practical discipline. Commenting on theology's engagement with the modern world J.J. Mueller states that if theology cannot take the heat then it must get out of the kitchen. If it cannot address the pain and frustrations of modern people then it has nothing to say to the world. Its relevancy is gone.⁷⁹⁵ SCCs members have a unique opportunity to theologize from the grassroots up.

d. The present general impact of SCCs on the parish and diocesan levels can be seen in different ways. Kilaini documents this interesting development in Dar es Salaam Archdiocese:

More than half of the parishes in Dar es Salaam were founded by Small Christian Communities. Normally in new residential places a few strong Catholics would start a Small Christian Community and pray together in their houses. As they increased one faithful person donated an area to build a common prayer shed. The SCC divided as the faithful increased but the shed became common to all. As the Christians multiplied the faithful bought more land around the original plot or found a big plot in the neighborhood and asked permission to build a prayer house and kindergarten. The next step is that it

⁷⁹² The Peruvian theologian Father Gustavo Gutierrez, OP says that "the poor have a right to do theology." We can extend this to say that women have a right to do theology, youth have a right to do theology and African Small Christian Communities have a right to do theology.

⁷⁹³ Anselme Sanon, "Press Conference," *The African Synod*, 5, 2 (March/April, 1994, p. 14.

⁷⁹⁴ The Loyola Institute for Ministry at Loyola University (Jesuit) in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA has a LIMEX Program that includes two online specialization courses on Small Christian Community Formation: "The Inner Life of Small Christian Communities" and "The Public Life of Small Christian Communities." <http://lim.loyno.edu/onsite> The process of theologizing is important. The first course explores mutuality and the role of conversation, with its risks and potentials, in the inner work of Small Christian Communities. It explains how conversation is a root metaphor for SCC life. The second course explores how SCCs reach out to service, advocacy and witness in the marketplace.

⁷⁹⁵ J.J. Mueller, *What Are They Saying About the Theological Method?* New York: Paulist Press, 1984, p. 26.

becomes an out-station and later a parish. Through SCCs they develop a solidarity that builds parishes.⁷⁹⁶

Another example is a "One day SCCs Workshop" that took place at the Holy Ghost Cathedral in Mombasa Archdiocese, Kenya on 13 May, 2011. 49 people participated representing the 10 parishes in the Central Deanery and the seven parishes in the Mombasa West Deanery. There were also catechists who minister in the prisons in the Coast Province where there are SCCs of prison staff (warders, etc.) and SCCs of the prisoners themselves that meet weekly.

Archbishop Boniface Lele gave the opening talk and emphasized that we priests should not "preach" or give long reflections during the weekly Bible Service in the SCC members' homes, but rather encourage everyone to share their reflections on the Gospel. This applies to the homily during a SCC Mass in a home as well that should be a Shared Homily. The archbishop supports SCCs very much. He recalled the strong SCCs in his home parish in Kitui Diocese. This support and encouragement of many bishops is a key factor in the growth of SCCs in Eastern Africa.

During the workshop we identified 18 main obstacles (*vikwazo* in Swahili)/problems/difficulties in the growth of SCCs in Mombasa Archdiocese including: SCCs members come late; there are few men in the communities; lack of youth in the communities; tribalism and discrimination; SCCs are too large and there is a reluctance to divide them into smaller SCCs; and during the Bible sharing/reflection some members tend to preach rather than share. We discussed practical solutions means to overcome these obstacles -- what we call the medicine (*dawa* in Swahili) to cure these problems.

The follow-up plans started with the two deaneries choosing three member committees for coordination and planning. There was a proposal for a Mombasa Archdiocese SCCs Training Team⁷⁹⁷ coordinated by the Pastoral Office. Such a team could give SCCs Workshops in the six deaneries in Mombasa. Members of the team could include the eight people who participated in the LUMKO Workshop in Nyahururu, Kenya in September, 2011.

As part of our ongoing evaluation and revitalization, our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team continues to facilitate *Vikwazo/Dawa* Workshops especially on the local level. On Sunday, 23 February, 2014 we facilitated a SCCs Workshop at Our Lady, Queen of Peace Parish South B, Nairobi, Kenya. Each of the 34 SCCs ("Jumuiya" in Swahili) chose ahead of time three main obstacles/problems/situations they wanted to discuss and find solutions for. During the workshop the 132 participants identified and discussed the 40 major obstacles/problems/difficulties in their SCCs. Then they voted for the most important/most pressing obstacles: "Time" issues (lateness, time management) -- 62 votes; Poor attendance -- 52 votes; Poor/Irresponsible Leadership -- 27 votes; and Lack of Men -- 21 votes. These obstacles are very similar to the results from other workshops. The challenge is to find

⁷⁹⁶ Method Kilaini, "Small Christian Communities," p. 5.

⁷⁹⁷ This is explained very well in the book *Small Christian Communities: Capturing the New Moment*. Chapter 15 (pages 106-109) in the article on "SCC Diocesan Training Team Reaches Out in Uganda" by John Vianney Muweesi and Emmanuel Mwerekande that describes the very good team in Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese in Uganda.

specific solutions and not just talk “around” the obstacle. Among the solutions/conclusions/*dawa*: a SCC should not depend on/wait for one specific leader to come to the meeting; several SCC members should be trained for specific roles such as facilitating the weekly *Bible Service*; more frequent SCC masses in the communities in addition to the annual Patron Saint/Patroness Saint Mass. This is also an opportunity for the SCC members to talk with the priest and give him a report on the SCC’s activities; visit lax SCC members and dropouts in their homes; and more SCC Workshops especially on specific ministries, for example, how to facilitate the steps of the weekly *Bible Service*.

A related example: Before a Formation Meeting of the Pope John Paul II Parish Evangelizing Teams at the Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers Regional Center House in Nairobi, Kenya on Sunday, 23 January, 2009 SCCs leaders discussed the question: “What are the different human problems in Kenya that we should reflect on in our SCC meetings in the light of the Gospel?” (St. John Paul II). They identified eight major human problems in Kenya and chose the three most challenging ones: two affecting general society especially (“corruption” and “tribalism”); one affecting the pastoral life of the Catholic Church (“problems in marriage”). Then the 116 participants divided into seven SCCs of around 15 people each. They reflected on these three problems and found corresponding/parallel passages in the *Bible* that offered light and inspiration.

The pastoral care of marriage remains one of the biggest challenges in the Catholic Church in Africa and around the world. Questions and issues include: Abusive and violent husbands due to strong temperament, alcohol and drugs. Patriarchy in African society. Why so many African Catholic couples cannot receive communion because their marriages have not been sacramentalized (blessed in church) because the dowry or bridewealth has not been paid and a church wedding is too expensive. Counseling for couples who struggle in their marriage. Communion for Catholics who have divorced and remarried. Our specific challenge: How do SCCs members respond?

Kenyan Bishop James Maria Wainaina of Murang’a Diocese sees an increasingly important role for SCCs in Eastern Africa. They replace the traditional African culture and family as the “environment” for the support, formation and training of members of African families. He describes the Integrated Christian Formation Program (ICFP) in his diocese.⁷⁹⁸ Catechesis takes place throughout life, not just during the Rites of Passage. Much of the formation and training takes place in the SCCs. Archbishop Martin Kivuva of Mombasa Archdiocese supports this plan emphasizing that the traditional African family system of education is “broken” so we need a new model.⁷⁹⁹

It is important to read the signs of the times in Africa today. The Kenyan report for the 2015 Synod of Bishops states: “Christian marriage is not supported by the African traditional cultural structures of marriage. There is need to create Christian structures that will support marriage in Africa...Community and church leadership should to be involved in marriage negotiations along with the family members; if need be the community should be

⁷⁹⁸ Based on a conversation of James Maria Wainaina with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 8 April 2015.

⁷⁹⁹ From a conversation of Martin Kivuva with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 9 April 2015.

encouraged to help with the dowry.”⁸⁰⁰ This has introduced a new term -- the SCCs-based wedding.

In reading the contemporary signs of the times (that includes the growing influence of the social media) in Africa there is a new emphasis on the equality of the man and the woman, the husband and the wife. There is a shift away from patriarchy and terms such as “the man is the head of the family” and “wives should be submissive to their husbands.”⁸⁰¹ This is especially true in urban Africa. The Kenyan report for the 2015 Synod of Bishops states that “the Catholic Church needs to emphasis the equality of partners in marriage.”⁸⁰² As stated above, SCCs as the church in the neighborhood can be the environment or setting for Christian values of equality, sharing, mutual respect and joint decision-making in marriage and the family.

⁸⁰⁰ Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), “Results of the Consultation in Kenya on the 46 Questions in the *Lineamenta* on *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World*, Nairobi: Unpublished Report, 2015, p. 30.

⁸⁰¹ There is growing criticism of traditional African proverbs and sayings that portray the man as superior to the woman and that describe the woman as a servant, submissive, passive, the weaker sex, etc. For example, there is the striking Swahili (Eastern and Central Africa) saying *Hajapata jiko bado* that means *He has not gotten a stove yet* (literal) and *He has not gotten married yet* (figurative).

⁸⁰² *Ibid.*

8. Evaluation of the Influence of AMECEA's SCCs in Africa and Around the World

A Ugandan (and other African languages) proverb says: *One hand washes the other.*⁸⁰³ We try to help each other and share our SCC experiences in the nine countries of Eastern Africa with other parts of Africa and around the world. During this 1973-2018 period SCCs in the AMECEA Region have gradually become known and influential outside of our nine countries. We can be proud of this increasing Eastern African contribution to the World Church.

Some years ago Pengo participated in a SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) Meeting in Rome. He tells the story of a bishop in West Africa who approached him and said that he had heard of the success of the SCCs in

⁸⁰³ In turn the SCCs in Eastern Africa can learn from the creative efforts in other parts of Africa such as Lumko and RENEW Africa in South Africa, the long experience of Basic Living Ecclesial Communities (Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes de Base or CEVB in French) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), etc.

An example is how the AMECEA countries borrowed the practice of Buzz Groups from the Lumko Missiological Institute in South Africa. Women were shy would often remain silent in the weekly meetings of the SCCs in South Africa. The men did most of the *Bible* sharing and reflections in the full group. But when Lumko started Buzz Groups of two people each (SCC members sitting next to each other share their reflections on the reading in small groups of two or three each), the women began sharing and reflecting together. A big change occurred in South Africa and there was more active participation. This has worked very well in SCCs in Eastern Africa too.

More information on the technique of buzz groups or “buzzing” that is easy and effective can be found in the section on “The Animator Makes Use of Buzz Groups” on page 9 in Oswald Hirmer, *Our Journey Together: 47 Catechetical Sessions for Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)*, St. Paul Publications Africa (later Paulines Publications Africa), 1998, 2006. The Swahili version is *Safari Yetu Pamoja*. The Swahili version adapted to Marsabit Diocese, Kenya is *Safari Yetu Pamoja Jimbo Letu*.

Buzz Groups can be effective in increasing participation in many different situations. This example was used in a talk on “Evangelization and Inter-religious Dialog:” “I ask each to you to think about a conversation or talk that you have had with someone who is not a Christian. This person could be a Muslim, a Buddhist, a Hindu, a Jew, an atheist, an agnostic, whoever. The topic could have been about anything – not necessarily about religion. Looking back how do you feel about the conversation? How did you feel about the other person? In general was it a positive or a negative experience?. Now turn to your neighbor where you are sitting and in buzz groups of two share something about the experience that you had.”

Eastern African SCCs can be enriched by the DRC experience that has been documented in books and booklets such as Bernard Ugeux and Pierre Lefebvere, *Small Christian Communities and Parishes*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995.

Eastern Africa and wanted to learn from our experience. Gradually the AMECEA experience of SCCs has spread to Southern Africa and English-speaking West Africa.

So far AMECEA's SCCs are not well known in French-speaking Central and West Africa. This is clear from reports of conferences that take place in French-speaking Africa. For example, many Catholic Church leaders do not know about the *Bible* reflection methods used in SCCs in the AMECEA Region. Hopefully the Biblical Center for Africa and Madagascar, commonly known as BICAM, that is located at the SECAM Secretariat in Accra, Ghana can spread information about the AMECEA countries' SCCs experiences.⁸⁰⁴ As an overall assessment Wirba writes: "The pastoral model of Small Christian Communities initiated and greatly fostered by Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa (AMECEA) has slowly gained ground in other parts of sub-Sahara Africa."⁸⁰⁵

Articles like Gilbert Biziyaremye's "The Relevance of *Ecclesia in Africa* for Small Christian Communities in Africa: Case of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kigali, Rwanda" help to bridge the gap between French-speaking Africa and English-speaking Africa. This article was published in *African Christian Studies*, the theological journal of CUEA and has many references to SCCs in Eastern Africa. With the importance of English growing in Rwanda and the country of Rwanda increasing its political, economic and religious ties to East Africa many connections are emerging. The theology and praxis of BECs or SCCs in Kigali resembles closely the model in Eastern Africa.

Ireneaus Chia Chongwain reports from Cameroon:

The Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province's Pastoral Plan gives the green light for the creation of Small Christian Communities. It is in this light that during the last Archdiocesan Pastoral Week it was recommended that the clergy, religious and lay leaders should commit themselves and be effectively involved in Small Christian Communities.

This was the umpteenth time the call was being made and shows the importance the bishops of the Bamenda Ecclesiastical Province attach to Small Christian Communities. Despite these repeated appeals for greater involvement in these groups, more women than men are taking the lead in registering, directing and organizing the affairs of different Small Christian Communities. This is not to say men are not involved, but the majority of men and youths are yet to make up their minds in joining these groups.

At a time life is becoming increasingly difficult for the average Cameroonian, it is but logical to learn from the Kenyan Small Christian Community experience where these groups have shown their burden sharing

⁸⁰⁴ See "Report on Consultation on Methods of Research to Find Out How the *Bible* is Being Used in Small Christian Communities in Africa," sponsored and organized by BICAM, Karen, Nairobi, Kenya, 31 January to 2 February, 1989.

⁸⁰⁵ Kenyuyfoon Gloria Wirba, *Women and Inculturated Evangelization in Africa*, p. 180.

propensity and helped the destitute in finding their bearing. Tell me your involvement in a Small Christian Community and I will tell you your faith!⁸⁰⁶

The implementation of *Africa's Commitment*, the Apostolic Exhortation of the Second African Synod has brought new opportunities for sharing SCCs experiences. Kenyan diocesan priest Father Jude Waweru, the AMECEA Justice and Peace Coordinator, gave a presentation on “Small Christian Communities at the Service of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace within AMECEA” in a Panel Discussion on the topic “The Response of the Church to the Outcomes of the Second Africa Synod” at a Post-Synodal Consultative Meeting on the theme “Africa Rise Up!” in Cotonou, Benin immediately after the pope’s visit in November, 2011. The meeting issued an action plan, *The Cotonou Resolution*, that identified implementation strategies. Concerning a methodology that takes into account the local environment the action plan states: “Apply the research-action method that stems from social analysis to point out the major axes of an overall social pastoral.”⁸⁰⁷

Some SCCs in Eastern Africa have reflected on *Africa's Commitment* one chapter per week for five consecutive weeks. The dioceses under the Metropolitan of Mwanza Archdiocese, Tanzania had a three day training session on Training of Trainers (TOT) on the implementation of *Africa's Commitment* from 17-20 January, 2012 in Nyakahoja, Mwanza. AMECEA sponsored a three-day Workshop on the “Implementation of the Papal Exhortation Document *Africa's Commitment*” for delegates from the nine AMECEA countries in Limuru, Kenya from 6-8 March, 2012. The theme was: “Shaping the Destiny of the People in the AMECEA Region after the Second Synod for Africa.”

Over the last 40 years an interesting pattern has emerged in official Vatican documents. St. Paul VI used the expression Base or Basic Christian Communities that shows the Latin American influence. St. John Paul II⁸⁰⁸ used this same expression as well as Living or Vital Christian Communities that shows the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) influence. Gradually the expression Small Christian Communities has become more popular worldwide – in North America, in parts of Asia and in English-speaking Africa. Pope Benedict XVI uses the expression Small Christian Communities (as well as Small

⁸⁰⁶ Chongwain, Ireneus Chia, “Editorial: Small Christian Communities, Learning from the East African Experience,” *L'Effort Camerounais*, 23 October, 2008, *L'Effort Camerounais* Website, retrieved on 22 July, 2014, <http://www.leffortcamerounais.com/2008/10/editorialsmall.html>

⁸⁰⁷ “General Report on the SECAM Post Synodal Consultation on Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Africa,” Cotonou: Privately Printed, 23 November, 2011, No. 5.

⁸⁰⁸ It took time for SCCs to enter the vocabulary of the official church. Blessed John Paul II visited Kenya three times in 1980, 1985 and 1995. During his first visit he did not refer to SCCs in his speech to the Kenyan Bishops. Such speeches are drafted by his advisers, sometimes added to and revised by the pope and then finally approved by the pope. One Kenyan bishop commented that in the African context when the father does not talk about things important to the children they are puzzled. Fortunately the pope advisors briefed him about on the importance of SCCs in the Kenya Church and he referred to them in his second and third visits.

Communities) more and more. One can assume that this is due in part to the influence of our Eastern Africa SCCs.

During visits to Rome in the 1980s I was told that people mainly knew the Latin American experience of Base or Basic Ecclesial Communities and were wary of this liberation, social action model. When the pastoral, parish-based model of SCCs in Eastern Africa was clearly explained during the 1994 First African Synod a new door opened. We began to publish more articles and books on our Eastern Africa experience such as the two part article on the “Current Reality of the Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa and Their Relationship to the Documentation on the 1994 African Synod” in *Omnis Terra* published by the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. Documentation on AMECEA’s implementation of the 1994 African Synod was sent to, and published by, the Synod of Bishops Office. Vatican Radio broadcast interviews on the pastoral model of SCCs in Eastern Africa in both English and Swahili. The word was slowly getting around.

Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese in Uganda has very active SCCs. Some years ago Bishop Joseph Mukwaya (who died in 2008) invited the Apostolic Nuncio in Uganda to visit the SCCs during a pastoral visit to the diocese. The nuncio was cautious saying that he was only familiar with the liberation, social action model of the Base or Basic Ecclesial Communities in Latin America. Quoting Jesus’ words in the Gospel Bishop Mukwaya said: “Come and see.” “Come and see our pastoral model that is connected to the parishes.” The nuncio visited these SCCs and was impressed, and even converted, to this Pastoral, Ecclesial Model of the SCCs in the AMECEA Region.

Mukwaya was very committed to the SCC Model of Church. Although a loyal, orthodox bishop he did not put rules and regulations ahead of pastoral care. We were visiting a parish in his diocese. The next morning he celebrated a Children’s Mass for the children of the local Catholic Primary School. The Lectionary Reading was the story of “The Woman Caught in Adultery.” Mukwaya said that it doesn’t fit his congregation of little children so he changed to the Gospel story of “Let The Children Come To Me” (*Mark* 10:13-16).⁸⁰⁹

⁸⁰⁹ On Tuesday, 28 September, 2021 our St. Isidore of Seville SCC had it weekly online gathering to read and reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday – the story of “Let The Children Come To Me” (*Mark* 10:13-16). Following my usual practice, on the previous Monday I read and reflected on this Gospel passage and chose “let the children come to me” as my mantra or special verse. During our weekly online gathering our usual practice was to:

1. Read the Gospel of the following Sunday (first time).
2. Mention a word, phrase or image in the Gospel that strikes you the most/ resonates with you the most/stands out to you the most.
3. Read the Gospel of the following Sunday (second time).
4. Silence. Listen to what God is saying/what God wants to tell us today in this Gospel passage. This period of silence is not wasted time or empty time. This can be a time of deeper listening, deeper reflection and new insights.
5. *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection/*Bible*—Daily Life Connections. Connect, relate and apply the *Bible* (Gospel) to our daily lives and lived experience on both the personal and society-wide levels. This is lectionary-based faith-sharing/Gospel-based faith-sharing. SCC members share their reflections sitting together in a circle and for a maximum of five minutes.

Fifteen years ago a priest from Eastern Africa wanted to write his Doctorate Dissertation on “Small Christian Communities in Africa” at a university in Rome. His supervisor turned down the topic saying that there was not enough literature on the subject. Sadly he did not realize that over 100 books and booklets had been written on SCCs in Africa. Now in 2017 over 200 books, booklets, reports and case studies have been written in English on SCCs in Africa with many more resources in French. Happily many of these resources are now available in libraries in Rome especially in the Pontifical Urbaniana University. Many are documented in *Mikado* (the Japanese name for “door”), the online Mission Library and Catholic Documentation Center sponsored by Missio in Germany. In recent years theses and dissertations on SCCs in Eastern Africa have been written in universities in Rome such as the Alphonsiana, Angelicum, Gregoriana, Lateranensis, Salesiana and Urbaniana as well as many other universities worldwide.⁸¹⁰

Yet tensions and differences of theological opinion remain. An African priest wanted to write a Master’s Thesis at the Urbaniana on the importance of SCCs in the Pastoral Plan of his diocese. One of the more conservative (traditional) African professors at the university advised him against the project. The professor said a Diocesan Pastoral Plan was not necessary. All you need is Canon Law.

There always has been a close bond between the Local Church in Eastern Africa and the Local Church in Germany.

On the global stage a SCC team from Eastern Africa participated in four physical international SCCs/BCCs/CEBs meetings: Notre Dame, Indiana, USA in December, 1991 (when Bishop Christopher Mwoleka⁸¹¹ participated)⁸¹²; Notre Dame, Indiana, USA in October, 1996 (when Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki participated);

During the silence I felt God moving me to a new reflection. I recalled the Mukwaya story above and remembered Pope Francis emphasizing the spirit of the Gospels rather than the legal liturgical and canonical regulations.

⁸¹⁰ Recent examples are Charles Ddungu, *Fostering the Participation of Laypersons in Pastoral Ministry: Towards Contextual Formation of Lay Ministers and Leaders of Small Christian Communities in Tanzania*, Leuven: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2011. Alex Masangu, *The Locality of the Church. Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa and in the Catholic Diocese of Tanga, Tanzania*, Innsbruck: Universität Innsbruck, 2011. Vincent Muhindo, *Reviving Small Christian Communities in the Diocese of Kasese, Uganda*. Rome: Pontificia Universitas Urbaniana, 2008.

⁸¹¹ At this consultation each national delegation led a prayer event. The East African Delegation led an African Mass with Mwoleka as the Chief Celebrant. The Brazil Delegation, consisting of four young women in their twenties and an Irish missionary sister, led a “Prayer Service with Communion.” Mwoleka received communion from one of these young women who was the Eucharistic Minister. He said that this style of communion was a dramatic example of this new way of being church. It was the first time he had ever received communion from a lay person and from a woman.

⁸¹² The delegation consisted of a Tanzanian bishop; a Kenyan-based priest; a Tanzanian Sister; a Kenyan laywoman; and a Kenyan young layman chosen from the Fish Group in Kisumu.

Cochabamba, Bolivia in November, 1999; and Notre Dame, Indiana, USA in November, 2002⁸¹³ (when Bishop Patrick Kalilombe participated). Several international meetings have taken place as International Audio Conferences (by regular phone, smartphone and various social media). The SCC presentations and additional reports helped delegates to understand our Eastern African experience of SCCs as a new way of being church and a new model of church.⁸¹⁴ Sharing experiences of SCCs around the world was an experience of mutual enrichment and mutual illumination.⁸¹⁵ SCC delegates from Eastern Africa have also participated in physical national meetings in England, Germany, Italy and United States.

Future meetings and webinars are planned on Skype, Goggle Hangouts, GoToMeetings, Cisco WebEx and other video conferencing technology.

Ten representatives from Kenya and Tanzania based at our Nairobi Hub (four laywomen, three laymen, two priests and one religious sister) participated in our Fifth International SCCs/BCCs/CEBs Meeting^{816 817} that was a three-hour live, online, virtual, interactive International SCCs Webinar (Web Conference) on “Small Christian Communities: The Church on the Move around the World.” It took place from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. USA Eastern Standard Time on Wednesday, 12 February, 2014 using Cisco WebEx Meetings technology. It was coordinated by the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana, USA. There were 40 participants. Participants from the Global South included: Africa (Kenya and Tanzania); Asia (India, Philippines and United Arab Emirates); Latin America (Mexico); and Oceania (Australia).

The first hour and a half was 10-15 minute reports from each of the six continents on “Successes/Accomplishments, Challenges and Future Priorities of SCCs around the World.” Each continental coordinator answered these three questions:

1. Name three successes/accomplishments of SCCs in your country/section of the country.

⁸¹³ “Global Spirituality for SCCs” sponsored by Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, 14-15 November, 2002.

⁸¹⁴ Reports on some of these meetings are listed in the “Select Annotated Bibliography of Books, Booklets, Articles, Reports, Papers and Printed Materials.”

⁸¹⁵ *Faith-sharing for Small Church Communities: Questions and Commentaries on the Sunday Readings* edited by Art Baranowski and the National Alliance for Parishes Restructuring into Communities (NAPRC), Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1993 presents life focus commentaries and questions on the Lectionary Cycles ABC from 7,500 members of SCCs around the world including African SCCs.

⁸¹⁶ The seeds for this meeting were sown at the “Second International Consultation on Small Christian Communities,” University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana, October, 1996. See the papers recommendations in Robert S. Pelton, ed., *Small Christian Communities: Imagining Future Church*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997.

⁸¹⁷ Full multimedia (print, audio and video) documentation of these five international SCC consultations is found in the Robert S. Pelton, CSC Collection (Examples of Pastoral Fortitude) in the Moreau Seminary Library at Notre Dame, Indiana, USA.

2. Name three challenges (problems, obstacles, questions) of SCCs in your country/section of the country.
3. Name three priorities for SCCs in your country/section of the country.

Key topics (listed alphabetically) that surfaced around the world are: “Formation and Training of SCCs Leaders;” “Getting a Greater Commitment from Catholic Bishops and Priests to Support SCCs;” “How SCCs Can Promote Family and Marriage;” “How to Attract More Youth Leaders and Members;” “How to Encourage More Courses and Workshops on SCCs in the Normal Curriculum of the Major Seminaries, Theological Institutes, Universities and Houses of Formation of Both Men and Women;” “How the National SCCs Organizations Can Collaborate More Closely Together;” “Importance of Lectionary-Based (*Bible*) Faith-sharing;” “Importance of Social Media/New Media in SCCs,” “Importance of Youth SCCs” (“How to reach out to youth/the young people generation”) and “SCCs Promote Justice and Peace.” The information, answers and reports are helping us in our ongoing evaluation, assessment and revitalization of SCCs in Eastern Africa.

At the beginning of the webinar Mrs. Rose Musimba (Kenya) asked the 10 participants at our Nairobi Hub to introduce themselves. She mentioned that Alphonse Omolo (Kenya), a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team, is presently based in Bochim, Germany finishing his graduate studies. She then presented the report on the Africa Continent that included the 180,000 SCCs in Eastern Africa:

Successes/Accomplishments:

1. Centering SCC meetings around *Bible* Sharing has made SCCs a way of life that enhances formation in the spiritual life and sacramental life of its members.
2. With the increased sense of belonging to the Church Family of God achieved by SCCs in Eastern Africa, SCC members participate more readily in the development of our parishes including fund raising and development activities.
3. Emergence of Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs)^{818 819} and Online SCCs.

⁸¹⁸ Reference to YSCCs can be traced back to Joseph Healey, “Twelve Case Studies of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa” in *How Local is the Local Church: Small Christian Communities and Church in Eastern Africa*. AMECEA Gaba Publications *Spearhead* Numbers 126-128 (1993), pp. 59-103 with the following Case Studies:

- “Youth Small Christian Communities in Kisumu.”
- “Three Youth Small Christian Communities in Bukoba (Bunena, Rubya Parish and Hekima Secondary School).”

⁸¹⁹ Various Protestant Churches especially Evangelical Churches have pioneered in promoting effective Student Small Groups. See “Effective Student Groups: Disciple the students in your ministry through intentional small groups.” SmallGroups Website, http://www.smallgroups.com/training-tools/e/effective-student-groups.html?tCode=35E0E2AD0D&dCode=5E6A34C02B&utm_source=buildingsmallgroup&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=9077722&utm_content=348703385&utm_campaign=2013

Challenges

1. Men and youth are leaving the SCCs to women.
2. Most SCC members come to the meetings late thus prolonging the length of the meetings and discouraging attendance.
3. The current program and process of SCC meetings leaves little time for discussion and implementation of AMECEA and Papal Documents.

Future Priorities

1. Formation and training of all SCCs members including clergy and religious to reduce the misunderstanding of different roles and responsibilities.
2. Networking of SCCs in the parishes for joint pastoral action.
3. SCC members include issues of unity and justice and peace in their actions in order to deal with the true local reality (*hali halisi* in Swahili) in their communities.

Sister Rita Ishengoma (Tanzania) presented the African Continent's "Plan of Action: Where do we go from here?"

Goal: The use of internet to promote SCCs in Africa and to attract especially the youth. Through the social media/new media and social networking online access will be a big help for SCC members who have their own internal communications networks. We will try to start and strengthen Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) in Eastern Africa. Our one specific concrete action is to offer three scholarships to young people in Eastern Africa (committed young adults under 30 years old) to the three-week Lumko SCCs Workshop in Nairobi, Kenya in September, 2014. The three young people are:

1. Miss Albina Chishimba Chishimba (Zambia):

Present work of ministry: The Archdiocese of Lusaka Youth Chairperson and Zambia National Council for Catholic Youth (ZNCCY) Vice Chairperson from 2013 to 2015. "I am a member of St. Maximillian Kolbe YSCC, Cathedral of the Child Jesus Parish, Lusaka, Zambia."

My hope following the Lumko course: "Continue working with the volunteer Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team."

NOTE: She hopes to take the Lumko Course in the future.

2. Mr. Meshack Nzioki Mbola (Kenya):

Present work of ministry: "I am currently working as a catechist in one of our parish outstations in Makindu Parish, Machakos Diocese, Kenya. I am a member of St. Sylvester SCC."

My hope following the Lumko course: "I expect the course to make me a better instrument of evangelization through the skills of the SCCs."

3. Miss Renata Dalmat (Tanzania)

Present work of ministry: Parish secretary at Itahwa Parish in Bukoba Diocese. I am a member of St. Barnabas SCC.”

My hope following the Lumko course: “I hope to get an education about theology and pastoral ministry and to impart that education to others especially to the Small Christian Communities.”

COMMENTS (from members of the Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team)

1. Mrs. Rose Musimba (member of St. Martin de Porres SCC in Nairobi, Kenya and St. Maria Goretti SCCs in Makindu, Kenya) and Sister Rita Ishengoma, STH (member of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus SCC in Bukoba, Tanzania):

A. Positive:

- The theme was relevant and articulated by all participants throughout the presentation.
- All animators shared ways on how SCCs participate in their own areas that were connected through the web conference.
- Designated coordinators who could not attend found means of sending their sharings that were read. This was very appreciated and encouraging.
- Viewing our friends from a far distance on the screen and also listening to their talks enhanced that this “New Way of Being Church” being applied in the Catholic Church worldwide.
- More Webinars (Web Conferences) are recommended for the future.
- The use of the Vatican II Documents on the background of SCCs by the facilitators of the Web Conference, Fr. Robert Pelton and Jeff Miller, proved how well we are connected with the Catholic Church at large.

B. Critique (used instead of “Negative” or “Weaknesses”):

- It was sad that Alphonse Omolo from Germany was not given a chance of sharing at the Web Conference which he attended from the beginning.
- Although designated coordinators were told to follow a general outline of questions, some didn't follow this. It was difficult to follow their sharings. We thank Rose Musimba, Barb Howard, and Bob Pelton (PowerPoint presentation) for their reports that were so clearly arranged.
- Time during the webinar was not given to our concrete plans of action regarding "SCC into the Future" that we think is very important. We thank the Eastern Africa participants' recommendation: “To get involved in the Catholic Church and general society through the Social Media.”

2. Mwalimu Simon Rurinjah (member of St Anne SCC in Nairobi, Kenya):

A. Positive:

- The webinar was a very good conference and encouraged us SCC members. Our problems are the same the worldwide over and we can learn from each other.
- We were happy to work as an African team.
- We were challenged to look squarely at the problem of the lack of a new generation of SCC leaders and animators who will take over in future.

B. Critique:

- The conference ended before time, three minutes before the hour. This discouraged many participants from sharing their plan of action.
 - The representatives from Germany did not have time to contribute because Europe's 10 minutes was up. But then Latin America was given a longer period.
3. Father Joseph G. Healey, MM (member of St. Kizito SCC in Nairobi, Kenya)

A. Positive:

- First, I feel that it was a minor miracle that the internet and cell phone technology worked here in Nairobi, Kenya. Though a Video Projector we showed the webinar on a large screen for all 10 of us on the African Team to watch and participate in together.
- A physical meeting would have cost upwards of \$50,000. This webinar costs only \$3,000.
- The key learning and challenge for me was Scott Appleby's historical and social analysis of SCC leaders and activists. Looking at the three generations after Vatican II:

1965-1985

1985-2005

2005-2025

Most of the participants in the webinar came into SCCs ministry in the 1965-1985 period. For example, of the five members of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team present, three are in their 70s, one in her 60s and one in his 40s. Scott rightly challenges us with the question: For SCCs to be a permanent and ongoing force and influence in the Catholic Church in the world where is the new generation of SCCs leaders and activists (people in their 20 and 30s⁸²⁰)? We need to reflect more on Scott's excellent observations.

- Several participants mentioned Pope Francis' support and encouragement for SCCs/BCCs/CEBs. See Scott's reference to the renaissance of SCCs during the present papacy, Pope Francis's letter to CEBs in Brazil. This is very important for the future.
- It was nice to see familiar faces from previous International SCCs Meetings and hear their updates.
- The Coordinating Team at Notre Dame especially Bob Pelton, Tony Oleck and Jeff Miller did wonderful work.
- Concerning our African Continent's "Plan of Action" we are have added two young people to our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team. 28-year-old Kenyan Mr. Peter Kyalo (member of the St. Joseph SCC, Doonholm Parish, Nairobi), the Assistant Administrator of the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, has joined the team especially for tech support. 22-year-old Zambian Miss Albina

⁸²⁰ As an amusing aside, CARA at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA conducted research on how to invite young adults to participate in Small Faith Communities in the United States. One respondent said: "If I had this answer I would be the most famous person in the world."

Chishimba Chishimba (member of St. Maximillian Kolbe YSCC, Cathedral of the Child Jesus Parish, Lusaka), the Vice Chairperson of the Zambia National Council for Catholic Youth (ZNCCY) has joined the team for outreach to youth especially in Zambia. Much of their SCCs ministry will be done online.

B. Critique:

- We tried hard but were largely unsuccessful to get good representation from Asia and Latin America.
- The sound was uneven. For those of us in Nairobi it was excellent from Notre Dame but less than average from Manila and Melbourne.
- Several presentations were overly long, winding and hard to follow without following the three-part format.
- Latin America and North America (with Bill D'Antonio's input) went over their time limit while we didn't get to hear from Germany at all.
- Not enough time was given to the lectionary-based Faith-sharing on the Gospel of the following Sunday.

After the webinar Indian Bishop Thomas Dabre, Bishop of Pune, India wrote:

“I wish to thank you for the report of the Web Conference on SCC. I am so sorry that because of my own difficulties I could not participate in the conference. I thank you very much for the report which I read carefully. Some comments:

1. I am very happy that for the last so many years SCC work has been going on in different countries of the world.
2. The SCCs are establishing committed leadership which is emerging at the local levels.
3. There are leaders with a vision and mission who have been continuing the work steadfastly.
4. There is an atmosphere of joy, interest and commitment around the Word of God.
5. There is a strong sense of the importance of lay people and their leadership.
6. Regarding the difficulties that you have mentioned in the report, they are the same also here in India namely the majority are women, late beginnings of the meetings, etc.

Let me conclude by saying that your report will help me in the three talks that I am going to give in Germany in the month of May.⁸²¹

Let us hope that there are more similar SCCs Webinars in the future.

RENEW International coordinates national and international “online/virtual conferences” through GoToMeetings video conferencing software and Skype.⁸²² The Marianist Lay Formation Initiative (MLFI) uses Google Hangouts.

⁸²¹ Thomas Dabre email message to the author dated 1 April, 2014.

⁸²² The Missio (Aachen, Germany)'s 2012 volume in their book series "Theology of the One World" is on the topic “Small Christian Communities/Basic Ecclesial Communities around

Recent research indicates that there are “around” 52,000-55,000 Small Christian Communities (also called Small Church Communities and Small Faith Communities) in the United States – slightly more than the number in Kenya alone. This figure is based on the significant research done in a late 1990s study (see Bernard Lee with William V. D'Antonio, *The Catholic Experience of Small Christian Communities*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000) and new research and projections by William V. D'Antonio in 2011. The figure could go even higher. D'Antonio says. “There are some areas of the country where Hispanic Catholics flock to Small Christian Communities.” This is within the context of the lack of the network of Catholic schools that were in place even one generation ago. Regarding these thriving Hispanic communities in the USA he adds: “Our survey indicates that 28% of Hispanics are or have been active in SCCs.” William V. D'Antonio in an email message to the author dated 8 November, 2011. Similar research indicates that Black Catholics in the USA do not respond well to this SCCs model, but Africans and African American Catholics in the USA do.

Commenting on the influence of the Cursillo movement in the USA, American theologian Timothy Matovina states: “One of the primary concerns of the [Second Vatican] Council Fathers was the spiritual renewal of the [Catholic] Church, particularly in response to the new circumstances of the modern world. Concurrent with the era of the council, apostolic movements [such as Cursillo] eclipsed pious societies as the primary Small Faith Groups among both Latinos and non-Latinos in the United States.”⁸²³

Some of these SCCs could be classified as the Small Apostolic Group Model of Church.

One interesting example of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is the 60 active Chapters of Maryknoll Affiliates throughout the world. I have had an opportunity to participate in many of the meetings and the activities of these chapters in: San Jose, California; South Bend, Indiana; Spokane, Washington; Washington DC; Westchester Country, New York; Mwanza, Tanzania and the online Kenyan Maryknoll Affiliates. These chapters can be classified as Small Mission Communities (SMCs).

The Affiliates Chapter in Mwanza, Tanzania was founded by Tanzanian Catholic lay women who graduated from high schools (secondary schools) of the Maryknoll Sisters.

On 1 October, 2017 the Maryknoll Kenya Affiliates Online Chapter had its first online meeting using the Zoom technology. Participants came from Mombasa and Nairobi, Kenya and various parts of the USA. The theme was inter-faith or inter-religious dialog. Another online meeting took place on 17 August, 2019.

the World.” Writers from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America treat: “Historical Development, “Foundations and Biblical Reference,” “Spirituality,” Ecclesiological Comprehension” and “Pastoral Vision.” The historical section covers the whole African continent: English-speaking Africa, French-speaking Africa and Portuguese-speaking Africa.

⁸²³ Timothy Matovina, “Latino Contributions to Vatican II Renewal, Origins, 20 December, 2012 (Volume 42, Number 29), p. 467.
<http://bellarmine.lmu.edu/media/lmubellarminesite/bcladepartments/theology/theologygradprograms/theologygradprogramsdocuments/CasassaLecture%20Matovina.pdf>

Another example is the Small Weekly Group Reunions that are part of the Cursillo Apostolic Movement. Joliet Diocese in USA has between 40 and 50 of these groups.

There are many things that Eastern Africa SCCs can learn from the United States experience.⁸²⁴ Some USA parishes use faith reflection starting with prayer as a “way of life” as seen in the style of their meetings,⁸²⁵ workshops, seminars, staff reflections, board reflections, ministries reflections, RCIA, even the committee to count the weekly collection, etc. The United States Catholic Bishops suggest: “Every parish meeting can begin with the reading of the upcoming Sunday’s Gospel, followed by a time of reflection and Faith-sharing.” See the experience of Hartford Archdiocese, Connecticut. The Pastoral Department for Small Christian Communities states: “Our mission is to promote and support small church communities and the doing of every parish activity in a reflective and relational way for the sake of building parishes where people regularly help each other connect life and faith.” <http://www.sccquest.org>. Ron Rolheiser said, “It seems that the time is right to take small communities in parishes seriously and do what we can to gather our younger generations into groups that allow them to engage with Christ through scripture, prayer, support, learning and action.”⁸²⁶

The Pastoral Department publishes *Quest*, a seasonal reflection booklet for SCCs that has valuable resource material for every Sunday of the liturgical year. The weekly sessions model an exercise of practical theological reflection. It centers on a two-fold movement: “Hearing the Lord’s Gospel” and “Hearing the Gospel of the Lord,” in other words, hearing Jesus Christ’s message and hearing him. We in Eastern Africa can learn from this approach that is an invitation for our SCCs to go deeper: to hear and receive the gospel more attentively and to listen and respond to Jesus Christ ever more deeply.

⁸²⁴ The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) has a Committee on Laity, Marriage, Family Life and Youth and uses the term “lay ecclesial ministers:”

These men and women of every race and culture who serve in parishes, schools, diocesan agencies, and Church institutions are identified by many different position titles. In *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* they are identified in a generic way as “lay ecclesial ministers.” This reflects on what they have in common and to propose some understandings of lay ecclesial ministry situated within our social and ecclesial environment and within the framework of the Church’s belief, teaching, and pastoral practice.

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) Website, retrieved on 13 November, 2014, <http://www.usccb.org/about/laity-marriage-family-life-and-youth/lay-ecclesial-ministry/index.cfm>

⁸²⁵ Some conferences and meetings use “Home Communities” that are small group gatherings (10 to 12 people) for sharing, reflection and insights gained that take place after Keynote Presentations.

⁸²⁶ Ron Rolheiser, Mid-Atlantic Congress, 7 March, 2013. Quoted in “November 2015 Monthly Message from Small Christian Communities,” email message dated 2 November, 2015.

Along with Hartford Archdiocese, Connecticut and St Petersburg Diocese, Florida, San Bernardino Diocese, California has been a pioneer and leader in SCCs in USA described as follows:

In 1998 our diocese visited the concept of Small Faith Communities. Since then we have experienced a renewal among many of our people. We choose this concept as a way of restructuring our Local Church as cited in the Diocesan Vision statement: *Our structures will empower participation, promote networking and facilitate collaboration...small communities of faith will support our commitment.* Together, let us vigorously take on this new task of developing each of our parishes into a “community of Small Faith Communities.” This will renew our families, neighborhoods and society in hope.⁸²⁷

“Restructuring our Local Church” certainly resonates with the AMECEA pastoral priority of developing SCCs as an official ecclesial structure in the parish. Experiments of pastoral restructuring have taken place in Eastern African dioceses such as Same Diocese in Tanzania. The Diocesan Synod in 1988-91 was an important turning point for Same. It was an experience lived by the people on the grassroots. The starting point was the questions and felt needs of families and SCCs from the bottom up, not discussion from the top down. An important result was more autonomy and decision-making on the local level.

The then Bishop Josaphat Lebulu of Same and his pastoral co-workers restructured the diocese according to a "Communion of Communities Ecclesiology" and the geographical reality of the Northeastern part of Tanzania. The traditional structure of Diocese/Parish/SCC did not seem to fit the local reality that includes large, disparate and unwieldy parishes and a physical geography of many hills and small mountains.

The new structure was Diocese/Center/SCC. Rather than focusing on the 17 traditional parishes they created 55 Centers (similar to sub-parishes or outstations) and around 250 SCCs. The priest(s) and other full time pastoral workers lived in one of the centers and not in what was formerly called the "parish headquarters" where the rectory, convent and primary school are located. In this new pastoral paradigm Same Diocese became a network of 55 Mass Centers made up of the local neighborhood SCCs. In this model the diocese is a "Communion of Centers" and the center is a "Communion of SCCs." The pastoral animation and service try to get down to the grassroots where the people live and work. Eight lay ministries were started in the SCCs and continue on the center and diocesan levels. These ministry leaders form a team of coordinators/formators on the SCC, center and diocesan levels.⁸²⁸

An interest example of *we create the path by walking* in the USA is the SCCs that have developed out of the Cornerstone retreat program. Cornerstone is a 26-hour weekend

⁸²⁷ Susan DeGuide and Steven Valenzuela, “Development of SFCs in San Bernardino Diocese, California,” *Small Christian Communities Today*, p. 46.

⁸²⁸ See Joseph Healey, “Diocesan Structure of Small Christian Communities in Same” in “Twelve Case Studies of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa” in Agatha Radoli, (ed.), *How Local is the Local Church? Small Christian Communities and Church in Eastern Africa*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, *Spearhead* 126-128, 1993. pp. 59-103.

retreat experience in a parish allowing adults to become more actively involved in their spiritual development by examining and perhaps sharing their own stories, reflecting upon others' stories, forming meaningful relationships and building community with God. The goal of Cornerstone is for each retreatant to develop a stronger connection to God so that he or she may live the life that God wants him or her to live. There's no big mystery to a Cornerstone weekend. It is simply ordinary people sharing stories and experiences of trying to live the Gospel amidst the challenges of the modern world. It's a simple but moving experience. Afterwards participants often form ongoing Faith-sharing Small Christian Communities in their parishes to continue their spiritual growth in the knowledge and love of God while helping others do the same. The name of one such SCC in Newark Archdiocese, USA is Faith Circle. <http://www.cornerstonexp.org> Yet it is clear that Faith-sharing is not for everyone. Certain people find it too personal and too intimate. They do not want to share their weaknesses and vulnerability. Their sensitivities need to be respected. The USA model is that men and women have separate Faith-sharing Small Christian Communities. This seems to work better.

St. Austin Catholic Parish in Austin, Texas, USA fosters the involvement of its members in Small Christian Communities, reminiscent of the early Church. The larger parish church then experiences itself as a communion of communities. This image is expressed most concretely as the communities come together in service of others, care and concern for one another and in the celebration of the Sunday Eucharist. Names to show the creative diversity of these SCCs include Contemplative Prayer Community, Moms of Small Children Community, Seekers Community (“for us the Scriptures are always fresh because our experiences each time we read them are always different from those of the previous occasions”), Sunday with the Word Community (intergenerational -- grandparents, parents and children), Vincentian Community I, Visitation Community and Wednesday Night Family Community (community of different denominations, Catholic, Episcopal, Presbyterian, Lutheran). All these small communities have some kind of *Bible Sharing*, *Lectio Divina* and Faith-sharing. Each SCC has a wide variety of celebrations and activities. <http://www.staustin.org/index.cfm?load=page&page=223>

St. Lawrence Catholic Church in Lawrenceville, Georgia, USA describes its SCCs vision as follows:

In many ways the Second Vatican Council got us back to basics by underscoring who we are as church: The church is the whole People of God. Baptism and Confirmation really do give each one of us the calling and the power to be holy, to be responsible for the Church's inner life and to take responsibility for the mission of the church in the world. The greatest unfinished task of the council, however, is to translate this vision into the ordinary Catholic parishioner's daily consciousness, to make the church “we” instead of “they”—and every day, not only on Sunday.

The plan developed at St. Lawrence for restructuring into Small Christian Communities (SCCs) allows us to affirm this sense of our identity as church. In the process we discover that what we are really doing is dusting off and polishing up the treasure we always had as the Catholic Christian community. SCCs have helped all of us to “be who we are better.” So wanting to restructure the present parish into smaller units is not really a departure from our tradition but a return to it. Our goal is the same “old” Catholic Church where the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit will continue to

operate—but in a way most effective in our time and place. All kinds of longstanding small group associations or sodalities make a big difference for the parish. It's hard to imagine any parish without parishioners relating at some smaller group level.

What's different in our vision? We imagine *all* parishioners relating that way as the normal course of parish life. More than 20 Small Christian Communities are already active at St. Lawrence. New SCCs are formed following each Christ Renews His Parish weekend. Christ Renews His Parish (CRHP) retreats are held twice a year for men and twice a year for women.⁸²⁹

One model is Small Intentional Eucharistic Communities (IECs)⁸³⁰ that are usually Small Faith Communities, rooted in the Catholic tradition, that gather to celebrate Eucharist on a regular basis. Born in the enthusiasm flowing from Vatican II for a church of the people, some IECs were instituted in parishes, some were created as alternatives to the parish, some retain close ties with the institutional church, but not the parish and some function independently.

An example in Kenya is the Catholic International Community (CIC)⁸³¹ located at Loreto School, Msongari and connected to St. Austin Parish in Nairobi.

⁸²⁹ St. Lawrence Catholic Church Website, retrieved on 7 December, 2015, <http://www.saintlaw.org/small-christian-communities>

⁸³⁰ They need to be distinguished from the Large Intentional Eucharistic Communities that can be 200 Catholics that gather for mass on Sunday

⁸³¹ “CIC is an international community of people who wish to come together to celebrate the Catholic faith. CIC was formed in 1983 by a small group of American families who met once a month to celebrate mass together and share other social activities. Very quickly, it grew and soon mass was being said weekly in the chapel of Loreto Msongari thanks to the generosity of the Loreto sisters. CIC today has over 150 active members/families and regularly we have over three hundred people attending our Sunday morning mass.

CIC is a part of St. Austin's Parish. We operate under the authority of and with the support and guidance of Father George Wambua, the parish priest of St Austin's and his assistant. We seek to support the parish in whatever way possible and, for example, at various times in the year we will take up the diocesan collections as part of the parish and the parish poverty alleviation programs receive regular contributions from us.

CIC is an entirely volunteer community everything we do is only done if someone volunteers to make this happen. This includes the celebration of mass, for which our celebrants volunteer. They all have other full time roles in Nairobi and CIC activities are things they support as an extra. We remain ever grateful for this.”

Catholic International Community (CIC) Website, retrieved on 6 October, 2017, <http://cickenya.co.ke>

Presently there are 129 IECs⁸³² in North America. In the face of this diversity, there is also a remarkably consistent desire to learn the theological rationale for a community's mission, practice uplifting and welcoming ministry and manage operations effectively using best practices learned from others or experience.⁸³³

These IECs can be grouped under the broad category of "alternative faith communities." The diversity of models is remarkable:

- alternative prayer/liturgy/mass models within conventional parishes (with priest and/or lay presiders).
- connected to a monastery, convent or Formation House.
- splinter parishes (separated for legal or protest reasons).
- alternative faith communities led by ministers from offshoot Christian denominations.
- ecumenical churches/communities.
- non-denominational churches/communities.
- woman priest-led communities.
- independent lay-led communities.

Another organization is the Federation of Christian Ministries (FCM) that is a Christ-inspired, ecumenical, post-denominational religious body. It is one of the many of reformgroups that are searching for new models of ministry.

These alternative faith communities are creatively responding to the contemporary signs of the times.

Certain new types of SCCs in the USA fit into this ongoing creativity. Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone, the Archbishop of San Francisco, California and chairman of the US Bishops' Subcommittee for the Promotion and Defense of Marriage states:

Yes, we do need something to support newly married couples. Singling out successfully married couples is a way to do that. We do that before the wedding to help prepare them for marriage, so, those older, more experienced couples could be mentoring them after they are married -- maybe in Small Faith Communities. There's been this movement in parishes for a long time now to form these Small Faith Communities around different themes, different ways of reflecting on the faith. Maybe this could be one such theme -- to have newly married couples in a Small Faith Community led by a more experienced married couple.

Small Christian Communities Facebook Page, retrieved 30 March, 2013.
<https://www.Facebook.com/pages/Small-Christian-Communities/279921983315>

⁸³² Some examples of Intentional Eucharistic Communities are *Communitas*, Francis House and Nova.

⁸³³ See William D'Antonio, "Communitas Celebrating Twenty Years of Building Community" in Healey and Hinton (eds.) *Small Christian Communities Today*, pp. 49-54.

Some USA parishes use websites and social media/new media as described in this report: "I am the 'marketing director of St. Charles Borromeo Parish' [Brooklyn Diocese, USA] and we have been using social media techniques for the past three years to not only spread the word, but to increase neighborhood awareness that we exist. We created our own YouTube channel where we make use of the ability to tape a "from the pastor's desk" message. It costs us nothing to create and we upload a different message each week to the website. We upload the bulletin each week and together we create new fresh content for the website. This allows us to keep the website current with new information and also sends the message that we are viable as a faith community. For so many years we had become just a Catholic building and not an active faith community as was our past history in the neighborhood. John O'Malley, "Collaboration on Information Technology", Catholic Standards for Excellence forum Website, retrieved on 21 July, 2012, http://catholicstandardsforum.org/forum/topics/collaboration-on-information-technology?xg_source=msg_mes_network

The Evangelical Churches in the USA are pioneering new forms of small groups. Menlo Church in Menlo Park, California is affiliated with the Presbyterian denomination called ECO: A Covenant Order of Evangelical Presbyterians. It has a wide variety of 320 Life Groups⁸³⁴ described as follow:

Our mission is to help anyone and everyone become a follower of Jesus. Because people matter to God. Because life is better in community. Because there is no problem in the world that apprenticeship to Jesus cannot solve. There's a difference between having a network and having a friend. Life Groups are small communities of people who want a place to be themselves, ask hard questions, and grow in their life with God.⁸³⁵

While the priorities for every Life Group are the same, their form and frequency vary. Adult Life Groups include: Couples' Groups, Men's Groups, Mixed Groups (couples and singles), Singles Groups, Women's Groups, Special Interest Groups and Young Adult Groups. In general there are ten members in each Life Group and they meet weekly or twice a month – primarily in the evening. 10 % of the groups use a Study Guide with discussion questions based on the televised sermon of the previous Sunday. The dynamic of the Life Groups is described as "up/in/out." The groups have a service dimension (practical outreach in the church, in the community and in the world) based on the saying *everyone can make a*

⁸³⁴ See also CityLife Church that is a multi-site, Pentecostal megachurch in Melbourne, Australia that has 520 Life Groups and 9,800 church members that meet in four different locations each week. 92% of the people who attend weekend services are connected into these small groups that serve as kind of Home Church. They are described as "small groups of people who meet together regularly in an informal environment." There are Life Groups for young people, campus students, young adults, young marrieds, singles, parents, adults, families, business people and a variety of age groups. Life groups generally meet two to three times a month. The church has a saying: "As we get bigger, we have to get smaller at the same time." CityLife Website, retrieved on 30 December, 2015, <https://www.citylife.church/life-groups>.

⁸³⁵ Menlo Church Website, retrieved on 5 December, 2015. <http://menlo.church/#life-groups>

difference. A South African proverb says, *If you think you are too small to make a difference, try sleeping in a closed room with a mosquito.*

Life Groups for Middle and High School students are available through Student Ministries. Menlo Church believes that the best place for connection and growth is in a Life Group. A Life Group is a small group of students who meet together weekly with one or two adult leaders. Girls match with girls and guys with guys by grade level.⁸³⁶

Research⁸³⁷ shows that a variety of small groups are more common in Evangelical and Pentecostal Churches. American Amy Jackson, the Managing Editor of SmallGroups.com states:

While small groups were pretty rare 30 years ago, most churches today have some form of groups. But there's a big difference between being a church *with* groups and a church *of* groups. Some churches offer small groups as one of their ministries—they're one of the many ways to get involved. But a [church of groups](#) sees small groups as central to the church—they're *the* way that the church accomplishes its mission.

There's nothing wrong with being a church *with* small groups, but there are limitations to what you'll accomplish in small groups. Becoming a church *of* groups will require a culture shift and a new plan, but it will allow you to do a lot more through your group ministry.⁸³⁸

The SmallGroups Website documents this case study by M. Scott Boren, Carolyn Taketa, Mark Ingmire, and more, *Become a Church of Groups*:

⁸³⁶ Based on conversations with Sue Kim-Ahn, Central Ministry Leader – Life Groups Eff Martin and Patty Martin in Menlo Park, California on 1-2 December, 2015.

⁸³⁷ The Small Groups Website provides interesting data:

Most churches in America struggle to have a significant percentage of their adult attendance in small groups. According to recent research done by Lifeway Research, only “33 percent of churchgoers attend classes or groups for adults (such as Sunday School, Bible study, small groups, or Adult Bible Fellowships) four or more times in a typical month. Fourteen percent attend two or three times a month.” Life transformation happens best within the context of community, so if a church is going to be intentional about discipleship they have to develop on-ramps to small groups that reach people on the fringes and beyond. If we continue to offer small groups to the normal church attenders, a majority of the people who show up to church are never reached.

Retrieved on the Small Groups Website, 21 November, 2015, http://store.faithgateway.com/small-groups-for-the-rest-of-us?utm_source=ct&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=sgftrou-post20151119

⁸³⁸ Amy Jackson, “Become a Church of Groups,” *Small Groups Newsletter*, 17 December, 2014.

In 2001, *Building a Church of Small Groups* was released, and we learned the story of Willow Creek, Indiana, USA transitioning from a church with groups to a church of groups. In other words, they went from a church with many ministries—which included small groups—to a church centered on small groups as the way of doing life and ministry.

Nearly 10 years later, the terms have stuck, and countless churches have embarked on the journey of becoming a church of groups. Rather than offer a buffet of ministries for church members to choose from, these churches are clear upfront: small groups are the core of our ministry and the way we develop disciples.⁸³⁹

Jackson adds:

The disciples' relationship with Jesus changed them forever in countless ways. And the same should be true for us today. But sometimes when we look at our small group experience, we don't see a lot of life change. We don't see people living on mission. We see a lot of lukewarm. Now is a great time to assess your group—and help your group members assess themselves—when it comes to transformation. In light of Easter, we can reexamine our lives for signs that God is working in and through us. I recommend using a book such as *Do You Lead a Life-Changing Small Group?* This resource includes assessments for leaders as well as assessments that group members take. Then talk through your responses and plan some concrete next steps.⁸⁴⁰

In the United States reports on SCCs in Africa are regularly published by *Gatherings*, *Small Christian Community Connection*, RENEW International,⁸⁴¹ Orbis Books, Paulist Press and posted on many SCC-related websites and blogs. People in the United States are especially interested in the structure of our Eastern Africa parish-based SCCs and school-based SCCs: How the election of lay leaders in parishes starts at the level of SCCs and move

⁸³⁹ Small Groups Website, retrieved 25 February, 2016, http://www.smallgroups.com/training-tools/b/become-church-of-groups.html?tCode=35E0E2AD0D&dCode=5E6A34C02B&utm_source=buildingsmallgroup&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=9077722&utm_content=418845744&utm_campaign=email

⁸⁴⁰ Amy Jackson, "Become a Church of Groups," *Small Groups Newsletter*, 4 April, 2014.

⁸⁴¹ In the online Catholic Standards for Excellence Forum Deirdre Trabert Malacrea writes: "RENEW International is dedicated to fostering the vision of the parish as a 'community of communities' per Pope John Paul II, and small communities as settings in which people encounter God and connect faith to daily life. I would like to suggest to interested forum members that they can consider two resources for this endeavor. *Sowing Seeds* offers tips for how to lead small community Faith-sharing. And *PrayerTime* provides the weekly Sunday Gospel readings in a format conducive to Faith-sharing. Retrieved on 18 August, 2012, http://catholicstandardsforum.org/forum/topics/prayer-and-Faith-sharing?commentId=6426509%3AComment%3A8014&xg_source=msg_com_forum

upwards. This insures that the parish council leaders are chosen from those who were already leaders in their SCCs – thus true representation from below. Our Eastern Africa weekly Lectionary-based SCC meetings, family-based model and Patron/Patroness Saints identity are creative challenges to American SCCs. African communitarian values can also challenge the excessive individualism (described as the “pervasive religious individualism of postmodern American culture”)⁸⁴², privacy and super-activity/”busy-ness” of American culture.

A Case Study of Eastern African SCCs’ influence on the Catholic Church in the USA comes from Malawi. Through the visit of a Montfort Missionary Priest to the USA a sister/twinning/partnership relationship developed between St. Joseph’s Parish, Namitembo in Zomba Diocese, Malawi and St. Bridget’s Parish in Seattle Archdiocese, USA. This parish twinning is described as follows:

St. Bridget has had a very active sister-parish relationship with the people of Namitembo Parish in Malawi since 1997. Our involvement began when Fr. Owen O’Donnell and Fr. Harold Quigg (our pastor at the time) met while both were on sabbatical in Ireland. As they talked, the idea arose of having some kind of relationship between the two parishes. Both parties were somewhat careful at first, and St. Bridget invited Fr. Owen to visit Seattle so that the Pastoral Council could speak directly with him. The visit was very fruitful, and after a matter of a few months, there was a signed agreement between the two Pastoral Councils.

Over the last 50 or 60 years, the Montfort missionaries have developed the network of Small Christian Communities that is the heart and life of the Catholic Church. Namitembo has perhaps 10,000 people in the parish area, with three priests, a couple of catechists, and a couple of religious sisters. The “neighborhood church” of 76 Small Faith Communities makes it all work. The small groups meet together every week, to share the Scriptures, pray, and talk about the ongoing work within their local area. Neighboring groups will come together for worship at one of the seven outchurches.⁸⁴²

When parishioners from St. Bridget visited their sister/twin parish in Malawi, they learned about the importance of SCCs especially how they bring families together. So they “borrowed” the idea and started SCCs in their American parish especially focusing on the social, interpersonal and family values.⁸⁴³

It is valuable to track how people in the USA take the praxis and theory of Eastern Africa SCCs and apply them to local contexts. American Benedictine Dom Damian Kearney, OSB discusses how SCCs offer a possible remedy for the alarming decline in

⁸⁴² St. Bridget Parish Website, retrieved on 5 September, 2012, <http://www.stbridgetchurch.org/namitembo.htm>. For the Winter, 2015 Update and an update on the 2015 Elephant Stampede Picnic see Namitembo Mission, retrieved on 19 December, 2015, <http://stbridgetchurch.org/namitembo>

⁸⁴³ Malawian Archbishop Thomas Msusa, Archbishop of Blantyre, Malawi and formerly Bishop of Zomba Diocese in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 4 September, 2012.

church attendance and the steady attrition of priests in Western countries. He sees SCCs as a model for the apathetic congregations of the church in the countries of the First World. In studying the SCCs in the USA he asks why committed Catholics feel the need to belong to such groups. The two reasons are a desire for more religious nurture than the parish normally provides and a hunger for community with relational depth.⁸⁴⁴

In two long conversations of Kearney and the author we envision the restructuring of USA dioceses so there are central Parish Centers that coordinate and link together a number of local Sunday Mass Centers/Sunday Worship Center that are undergirded by a network of SCCs led by laypeople. It is key that these SCCs are not be just administrative units and social support groups but spiritually and pastorally active through weekly lectionary-based Faith-sharing and pastorally accompanying their members in their sacramental life.⁸⁴⁵

American Patrick T. Reardon envisions the Catholic Church of the future in a crystalball-gazing essay that pictures Chicago Archdiocese, Chicago, Illinois, USA in 48 years:

CHICAGO, MARCH 13, 2063. Today St. Gertrude is one of only 42 full parishes. Over the past five decades, successive Chicago cardinals, working closely with lay Catholics and using a model developed in Europe, closed nearly 90 percent of the traditional parishes in Cook and Lake Counties in Illinois...Pastoral centers, dating from 2025 in Chicago, have been part of a two-prong approach by clerical and lay leaders in the archdiocese to provide for the spiritual needs of Catholics. The other prong is the full parishes...Often a pastoral center is formed by a Faith-sharing group whose members are looking for a site to serve as a meeting place and a base for community service...A parallel trend throughout Catholicism is Faith-sharing groups that meet in homes on a regular basis.⁸⁴⁶

An interesting model is the Church of the Nativity in Lutherville-Timonium, Maryland, USA. The parish has 300-400 Small Groups that meet weekly. Small Groups are where the great big church becomes a great small church. There are Adult Small Groups, three types of Teen Small Groups (called Ascent, Resurrection and Uprising) according to the grade) and Kids Small Groups. Nativity University is the ministry for young adults 19 -- 30 years old. This is an opportunity for young adults looking to connect with people their own age, explore their faith and a relationship with Jesus Christ. Online Small Groups for college students living outside the parish are being explored. With the motto *grow your faith in a circle*, the dynamic in the parish is that intentional faith-based relationships are key to

⁸⁴⁴ Damian Kearney, "Joseph G. Healey '56 Missionary Priest of Maryknoll," *Newsletter of the Abbey of St. Gregory Portsmouth R.I.*, July, 2015, Vol. XXXVI, No. 7, pp. 3-4.

⁸⁴⁵ Damian Kearney conversations with the author, Portsmouth, RI, USA, 22 and 24 May, 2015.

⁸⁴⁶ Patrick T. Reardon "A Church Refreshed: A Dispatch from an American Catholic Future," *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, May 22--June 4, 2015 print issue. *NCR Online Weekend Edition*, 23 May, 2015, <http://ncronline.org/news/art-media/church-refreshed-dispatch-american-catholic-future>

spiritual growth. This is described in their book *Rebuilt*⁸⁴⁷ and the website <http://churchnativity.tv/#/small-groups>

Nativity's Online Campus livestreams the Saturday afternoon mass and the four Sunday masses. There is an interactive chat feature.

This represents a new trend⁸⁴⁸ and pattern worldwide: the combination of a megachurch and a network of small groups. The big Sunday liturgies of thousands of people have an "entertainment," charismatic style and the small groups in the middle of the week focus on faith-sharing, *Bible* Reflection and an interpersonal approach. What began as part of the evangelical movement (Rick Warren and others) is now a trend in the Catholic Church in the USA especially in the South and Southwest. Can these small groups especially among Hispanic Catholics be the new face of SCCs?

We do not agree with Rich Warren's top down style. His Saddleback Church is an Evangelical Baptist multi-site megachurch, based in Lake Forest, California. It is the largest church in California, and one of the largest in the United States of America. The church has several campuses in California and around the world. After his sermon on a particular theme on Sunday that is broadcast simultaneously in the various campus/satellite churches of Saddleback Church in California, 1000s of small groups meet (in person or online) in the middle of the week to view a video based on the previous Sunday's sermon. Then small group discussion follows.

⁸⁴⁷ Michael White and Tom Corcoran, *Rebuilt: Awakening the Faithful, Reaching the Lost, and Making Church Matter*, Foreword by Cardinal Timothy M. Dolan, Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2013. See also Michael White and Tom Corcoran, *Tools for Rebuilding: 75 Really, Really Practical Ways to Make Your Parish Better*, Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2014 and Christopher Wesley, *Rebuilding Youth Ministry: Ten Practical Strategies for Catholic Parishes*, Notre Dame: Ave Maria Press, 2015.

⁸⁴⁸ What are the top five trends in small groups? *Small Groups Newsletter* product innovation team spent over a year in 2014-2015 conducting focus groups with small group leaders and participants to determine what trends exist in small groups...and how to better resource changing needs. What we discovered during those focus groups both surprised and inspired us.

1. We heard most churches are in a state of decline and that fewer small groups are being started.
2. Existing groups told us that they are slowly losing members and it is becoming increasingly more difficult to add new people.
3. Small group participants desire more authentic and relevant conversations about the challenges they're facing in life.
4. Participants are fatigued by existing content and are looking for something fresh and new that fosters relationships.
5. Small groups are moving more into the digital age. Fifty percent are consuming content on traditional DVDs, while the remaining 50 percent are streaming video content.

Small Groups Newsletter newsletter@lists.christianitytoday.com, retrieved 28 February, 2015.

Our Catholic SCCs Model is from the grassroots up. Ideally our SCCs are weekly lectionary based faith-sharing small communities that reflect on the *Gospel* of the following Sunday and connect it to our daily lives and promote regular practical action and social outreach.

At the RENEW Gala⁸⁴⁹ in West Orange, New Jersey, USA on 6 June, 2013 RENEW International gave its annual Msgr. Thomas Kleissler Award to Father Joseph Healey on behalf of the 180,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the nine countries of Eastern Africa.⁸⁵⁰ This was a special teaching moment to share the rich experiences of SCCs in the AMECEA Region with promoters, supporters and members of SCCs in the USA. Highlights included:

Display of Africana including maps, carvings, posters, books on SCCs and magazine articles on SCCs. A colorful SCCs bookmark called “Celebrating 180,000 Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa” was given to everyone at the dinner.

- Powerpoint Presentation in a Slide Show format (as a pdf file) on “We Are the Church: The Life and Activities of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa” with an African music background ran all evening on a continuous loop. <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/north-america/united-states-of-america/245-pp-presentation-on-sccs-in-eastern-africa-at-the-renew-gala-in-west-orange-nj-usa-on-6-june-2013.html>. Later slides of the RENEW Gala itself were added to produce a 49 slide show called *We Are the Church: The Life and Activities of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa Including Highlights of the RENEW Gala 2013 in New Jersey, USA*. <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/north-america/united-states-of-america/251-renew-gala-pdf--final.html>
- Two lap computers demonstrated the features of the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website including the opportunity to vote in the SCCs Poll on “The best part of my Small Christian Community is: ...”

⁸⁴⁹ The net profit from the evening was over \$230,000. The money is being used to help various RENEW Small Christian Community projects including Campus RENEW that is a pastoral process for faculty, students and staff on campus designed to help students connect their faith to their daily decisions, large and small. It is a two and a half year (or five semester) process which facilitates renewal and transformation on college campuses. See the RENEW International Website http://issuu.com/renew-international/docs/catalog2013fall-renew_issu?utm_source=2013W29_subscribers&utm_campaign=Digest&utm_medium=email

⁸⁵⁰ See “AMECEA: Communication Veteran Receives Award for Promoting Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa,” *AMECEA Online Newsletter*, No. 15 (13 September, 2013). http://amecea.blogspot.com/2013/09/amecea-communication-veteran-receives.html?utm_source=AMECEA+Newsletter&utm_campaign=67938ed69c-AMECEA+Online+Newsletter+6+5+2013&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_85fa866553-67938ed69c-6746297 and “An Icon of SCCs and Communication Veteran Receives Award,” *The News Dispatch with Omolo Beste*, Email Message, 14 September 2013.

- Five minute video of the honoree's acceptance speech on ["Celebrating 180,000 Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa."](#)
- Sister Ann Mutinda, MM, a former Kenyan Maryknoll Sister from Machakos Diocese led a Swahili clapping song called "*Iende Mbele Injili*" in Swahili that means "Let the Word of God Go Forth" and is used during our *Bible Processions* in Eastern Africa.
- The RENEW International Dinner Gala Program referred to the St. Kizito SCC in Nairobi, Kenya and the St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC.

In the Africa Room at the RENEW Gala guests donated \$776 in cash to support SCCs in Eastern Africa. Half of the money was used to help the St. Agatha Joy Women's Training and Tailoring Group, the women's group in St. Kizito SCC who have a sewing club. The money was used to buy a Singer Sewing Machine and African fabric materials. The women produce very nice African shirts and accessories, but have trouble finding good markets/good outlets for their products.

The other half was used to help the nine student SCCs in Christ the Teacher Parish at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya. A report is as follows:

During the 2013-2014 Academic Year at Kenyatta University funds from the RENEW Gala were used for the following:

- Seminar on "Training of SCCs Leaders," stipends for three trainers (\$188)
- SCCs Reflection Day, Facilitator Father John Muragu, stipend for facilitator (\$50)
- Three joint SCCs meetings with invited speakers, stipends (\$150)

Yet we still have a long way to go. In the past 25 years during frequent trips to the USA I have a pastoral hobby. I visit Catholic parishes and ask: "Do you have Small Christian Communities?" I get a variety of answers: "Yes, we have a few small prayer groups." We used to have RENEW groups but only a few have continued." "Individualism and privacy are so strong in the USA that small community efforts don't succeed well."

Then the parishioners will ask me: "Do you have Small Christian Communities in Africa?" I look down, dramatically pause, hesitate a little, and finally say. "Well, yes. We have 180,000 SCCs in Eastern Africa." People are very surprised and even amazed. We didn't now," they say.⁸⁵¹

⁸⁵¹ More serious that the lack of knowledge about Africa is lack of interest in Africa. American writer Jim Keane comments:

When I was living at *America Magazine* (2007-2009), we were talking one day at table about the way Jesuits embrace some topics and ignore others (or only have interest in their own preferred topics). For example, one of the men at the table complained that the Jesuits teaching in universities tended to glaze over when the talk turned to high school work; similarly, when men came back from the missions, they often found that the men involved in

In an interview in Rome in 2014 Tanzanian Bishop Bernadin Francis Mfumbusa of Kondoia Diocese, Tanzania was asked: “What do you think are the particular gifts of African Catholicism—and can they benefit the Church in the West?” He answered:

I think one of the greatest gifts of Tanzanian Catholicism is unity. Despite ethnic, regional and other differences, the faithful, for example, accept pastors and bishop from other parts of the country or from other ethnic groups without a problem. Another gift which can be emulated elsewhere are our “Small Christian Communities,” which have become a strong embodiment and expression of the Local Church in our country.⁸⁵²

The influence of Eastern African SCCs can be seen in a rather unique way in the World Church. The large number of African Catholic immigrants in Europe and North American carry with them their rich African Christian experience and values. Africans can go with joy, color, music and dance to enliven other churches in the rest of the world. Catholics in Eastern Africa (who have experienced SCC in their home African countries) are contributing to the revitalization of parish life and pastoral and missionary outreach in the Western countries where they now live. They now share their family and community values with the World Church.

A concrete example is Westminster Archdiocese in London, England. Demographic and sociological data indicate that over the last 20 years the English-born members of parishes in the London area have decreased and gotten older with the subsequent slowing down of Catholic parish life and energy. Now African and Caribbean Catholic immigrants are bringing a new dynamism to these parishes including more lively liturgies with singing and dancing and more participation in church activities. They are also participating in the over 2,000 SCCs that were started during the 2003-2005 “At Your Word, Lord” Renewal Program in the Diocese of Westminster.”⁸⁵³

the high schools and universities would not even bother to ask them how their work was going. One of my housemates, [Father] Peter Schineller, said that he had found this to be very true of American Jesuits in the case of Africa. If a man based in Africa came back to New York (because the West Africa province had been a NY Province region for many years, a great number of NY Jesuits had served in Nigeria, Lagos, etc.) and began talking at his work at table or mentioned something about Africa at preprandials, he would often be met by silence. Not because the men disliked Africa, but simply because they had no interest in it.

Jim Keane, email to the author, 16 October, 2015.

⁸⁵² Bernadin Francis Mfumbusa, “Is Tanzania the Next Target for Radical Islam?,” “The World Seen from Rome,” 6 February 06, 2014, *ZENIT News Service*, email message dated 6 February, 2014.

⁸⁵³ See Stuart Wilson, “At Your Word, Lord’ Renewal Program in the Diocese of Westminster” in Healey and Hinton, *Small Christian Communities Today*, pp. 90-95. This program has evolved over the past 10 years. Presently it follows the Small Apostolic Group Model of Church rather than the Small Christian Communities Model of Church even in its name. See the Diocese of Westminster, England Facebook Page, Dow Smallgroups, <https://www.facebook.com/dowsmallgroups>. While the program provides valuable small

Another example are the Catholics from Kenya living in floating communities/informal networks in cities in the United States such as the Baltimore, Maryland Area, the Boston, Massachusetts Area and the Sacramento/San Francisco/San Jose, California Area. Beyond having monthly or bi-monthly masses in their communities, plans are underway to form SCCs where these Kenyan Catholics would meet regularly in small groups in their homes for Faith-sharing, Bible reflection and socializing.

SCCs in the AMECEA Region challenge the American and European experience⁸⁵⁴ where family life and parish life are weakening. Africa's model of family-based SCCs with an emphasis on community values and relationships can give a positive message and influence to Western society that is witnessing the break-down of family structures.⁸⁵⁵

English diocese priest Mgr. James Cronin points out:

World Mission Sunday is an opportunity for parishes to create an awareness of our practical expression of faith rooted in community. In Africa, Latin America and Asia Small Christian Communities meet weekly to pray, study the Sunday readings and reflect on their application for their lives. These small communities break down the anonymity of the large parish, encouraging Faith-sharing and building stronger bonds of friendship. In our more individualistic society [Europe and North America], the wider church sometimes struggles to model community and friendship in this way.⁸⁵⁶

The Eastern African SCCs are part of the growing influence of SCCs/BCCs/BECs in the Global South. Filipino Comboni seminarian Caspis Jemboy, MCCJ, wrote a fine Final Paper in our 2013 SCCs Seminar Course at Hekima University College in Nairobi, Kenya on "Missionary Life and Outreach of SCCs in Africa and around the World." It is a good comparative study of SCCs in three countries: Kenya,⁸⁵⁷ Mexico and the Philippines.

Since Latin America is mainly Spanish and Portuguese-speaking our Eastern Africa SCCs are not well known. Online resources such as the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website and Facebook Page are helping to bridge this gap.

community Faith-sharing resource materials such as the Lent 2014 booklet called *Come, Follow Me* the SCCs are not an official ecclesial structure in the parishes.

⁸⁵⁴ A popular joke in Europe goes like this: "Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are like flying saucers. Everybody is talking about them, but nobody has seen one." This can't be said about Africa. We have "seen" many Small Christian Communities in Africa. We have participated in them. We have experienced SCCs as a new model of church in Africa today.

⁸⁵⁵ For a Case Study of the Eastern African model see Cieslikiewicz, "Pastoral Involvement," pp. 100-101.

⁸⁵⁶ James, Cronin, "One Faith, One Family." *Tablet*, 19 October, 2013, p.14.

⁸⁵⁷ Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 28 April, 2013 at: https://smallchristiancommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Jemboy_Caspis.pdf

There are many things that Eastern Africa SCCs can learn from the long and rich Latin American experience. The official name in Spanish is *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* (CEBs). The English translation is “Base or Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs).” The word “base” indicates that the communities are from the grassroots -- the social and economic “base” of society. They are also characterized by being the preferential option⁸⁵⁸ for the poor. The word “ecclesial” emphasizes that these communities are in themselves “church” – church at the most local level.⁸⁵⁹

Periodic national and continental CEBs meetings are a notable feature of the Latin American Church. Eastern Africa SCCs could follow this example. Brazil is famous for its Inter-ecclesial Meetings of the Basic Ecclesial Communities (CEBs). Pope Francis’ support and advice for the latest meeting was significant. The Holy Father wrote a letter dated 17 December, 2013 to the 13th Inter-ecclesial Meeting of the Basic Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) that was held from 7 to 11 January, 2014 in the city of Juazeiro do Norte in the Brazilian state of Ceara. It was the first time a pope has ever sent a message to this assembly in its 39 years of existence. Pope Francis talked of the base communities’ “most important role in the Church’s evangelizing mission.” The Vatican communique stated:

The pope conveys to the participants his wish that “the light of the Holy Spirit help you live with renewed enthusiasm the commitments of the Gospel of Jesus within Brazilian society,” and, recalling the Aparecida document, remarks that the CEBs constitute a tool for ensuring “greater knowledge of the Word of God, social commitment in the name of the Gospel, the appearance of new lay services and education in faith for adults.”

He goes on to reiterate that the CEB must be characterized by “a new evangelical impulse and the capacity to relate to the world for the renewal of the Church”, and that it is therefore necessary “not to lose touch with the rich reality of the local parish, and to integrate the organic pastoral [ministry] of the Particular Church”.

Pope Francis concludes the letter by mentioning that evangelization is the duty of all the Church, of all the People of God: “we must all be pilgrims, in the field and in the city, bringing the joy of the Gospel to all men and women. May the words of St. Paul resound in our hearts: ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!’”⁸⁶⁰

⁸⁵⁸ In English “option” often has a weak or tentative meaning like “possibility” or “alternative.” But in the original Spanish its is stronger like “choice” or “decision.”

⁸⁵⁹ Healey and Hinton, *Small Communities Today*, p. 7.

⁸⁶⁰ “Basic Ecclesial Communities: Committed To Transmitting The Gospel,” Vatican Information Service (VIS), Vatican City, 8 January 2014, retrieved on the *Vatican Information Service Website*, 9 January, 2013, <http://visnews-en.blogspot.com/2014/01/basic-ecclesial-communities-committed.html>

The meeting was dedicated to the theme: “Justice and Prophecy in the Service of Life.” 4,000 people, including 72 bishops, participated in the assembly. The president of the Brazilian Bishops’ Laity Commission, Bishop Severino Clasen, who is responsible for links with base communities, said, “The base communities have never had a stronger ally [than the pope].” One commentator wrote:

There are also questions about the culture of the base communities. With their straw hats and country music [from the rural areas], are they reliving a rural past that has long gone? That was certainly the view of a young woman from Manaus: “CEBs need a real makeover if they are to deal with the issues facing young people today rather than those of young people of 40 years ago!” Cue Bishop Clasen: “The Brazilian Church hasn’t worked out how to deal with urban issues.”⁸⁶¹

COMMENTARY

This is the first full statement that Pope Francis has made on SCCs/BCCs/CEBs since becoming pope. Taken in the wider context of SCCs in the World Church it is significant for three reasons:

1. The statement emphasizes four important activities of SCCs/BCCs/CEBs:
 - a. They are a tool for ensuring greater knowledge of the Word of God. (**weekly lectionary-based Faith-sharing**)
 - b. They provide social commitment in the name of the Gospel. (**service to reconciliation, justice and peace**)
 - c. They provide new lay services. (**new inculturated lay ministries**)
 - d. They provide education in faith for adults. (**adult faith formation**)

This is relevant for Eastern Africa too. This Ebook documents many examples of these four activities in the AMECEA Region. The Eastern Africa equivalents are listed in **bold** above.

2. It highlights the close link between SCCs/BCCs/CEBs and the parish and its rich pastoral reality on the local level. Pope Francis emphasizes this connection in *The Joy of the Gospel* especially No. 28.

3. Pope Francis emphasizes that SCCs/BCCs/CEBs members should be characterized by a new evangelical impulse and the capacity to relate to the world for the renewal of the Church. Evangelization is a duty that belongs to all of the People of God.

Eastern Africa could well imitate the plan of using printed materials in the Small Reflection Groups in Latin America. Lobinger writes: “Week by week, the whole year through, a leaflet is published with the *Bible* passage, a life story, and the reflection questions for the Small Reflection Groups. The publication of these leaflets is easy since in Latin

⁸⁶¹ Francis McDonagh, “Banging the Big Base Drum,” *Tablet*, 18 January, 2014, pp. 13-14.

America there is practically only one language in each country, either Spanish or Portuguese. A central office is therefore able to produce this reflection outline for the whole country.”⁸⁶²

An interesting comparative Case Study comes from St. Ann Small Christian Community in Phase III of Dandora Parish in the Eastlands Section of Nairobi Archdiocese:

One Sunday during the weekly *Bible* Service the Scripture passage chosen was *Luke* 1: 39-56 (the Visitation and the Magnificat). Most of the shared gospel reflections focused on the values of personal relationships and community in the story of Mary's visit to Elizabeth. The members of St. Ann SCC mentioned Elizabeth's hospitality in welcoming Mary. Mary helping Elizabeth around the house especially because she was six months pregnant. The two women helping one another and sharing with one another. One reflection related to the Magnificat itself: Mary's joy and happiness in being chosen to give birth to Jesus the Savior. The St. Ann SCC members reflected on the Visitation in the light of important African values such as visiting, hospitality and sharing together. But there was no mention of the "liberating elements" of the Magnificat that are so central to the *Bible* reflections of the Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) in Latin America.⁸⁶³

Eastern Africa SCCs can learn from the dynamic SCCs in Asia especially in the Philippines and South Korea. For example, the pastoral structures of the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) in Cebu Archdiocese in the Philippines. The archdiocesan seminary is designed on the small communities model. The Archdiocesan BEC Office has a staff of 10 people to coordinate SCCs activities.

As a country Philippines has a different pastoral structure that is chapel-based (similar to the outstations in Eastern Africa). This is the meaning of “ecclesial” in the name BECs. These chapels are composed of neighborhood cells (individual SCCs). This is similar to the Latin America model. The Committee on Basic Ecclesial Communities was set up by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) after the BEC National Assembly in 2005 in Cebu. It is made up of a chairman and the heads of eight episcopal commissions and assisted by an executive secretary and several consultants who work as a team. The office assists the bishops and their dioceses to realize the vision of renewed church through the building of BECs. See the official website of the office of the CBCP-BEC Committee called the CBCP-BEC Cyber Office <http://cbcpbec.com>.

The strong support of the bishops is seen in this summary of the views of Filipino Cardinal Orlando Quevedo, Archbishop of Cotabato, after he was made a cardinal in Rome:

The Asian vision of church is built on basic ecclesial communities with a collaborative leadership style. Asia's vision of church is relevant to the vision of Pope Francis who is looking at the periphery rather than at the center. The "main pastoral priority" in Cotabato is the building of basic

⁸⁶² Fritz Lobinger, “What SCCs and CEBs Can Learn from Each Other,” *East Asian Pastoral Review*, 2013/3, p. 287-297.

⁸⁶³ Radoli, *How Local is the Local Church*, pp. 59-103.

ecclesial communities in which the idea of forming persons of dialog is being implemented. The idea of leadership that is shared, not just a dictate from above, but collaborative, consultative -- what is called a participatory church -- is being built in the basic ecclesial communities. This is a participatory church, a church of the poor, an inculturated church and a church of authentic disciples -- true followers of Christ, not only in name but in deed.⁸⁶⁴

Filipino Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, Archbishop of Manila's talk during the Manila Archdiocesan General Pastoral Assembly (MAGPAS) on 14 June, 2014 has many implications and applications for Eastern African SCCs. He called on the Catholic faithful to manifest the characteristics of a renewed church through the promotion of Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) in every Catholic household. In his talk Tagle stressed the importance of BECs as the "expression of a renewed church. Basic Ecclesial Communities, under various names and forms," Tagle said, quoting the words of the **2001** CHECK Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II) – "must be vigorously promoted for the full living of the Christian vocation in both urban and rural areas."

According to Tagle, PCP II emphasizes the need for BECs to rally the faithful behind the Second Vatican Council's "vision of a renewed Church" and "for the full living of the Christian vocation." "PCP II does not tell us to establish BECs only in places where it would be easily accepted. What the PCP II urges us to do is promote it, regardless if it would be easy or hard," he said.

Noting the different characteristics of a renewed church, the Manila Archbishop called on the faithful to live in communion with one other, noting that individual differences should not serve as a hindrance to achieve unity in diversity. "Communion opens our hearts and doors to anyone," he said.

"In the renewed Church of Communion, regardless of who you are and what you have become, we are all equal because we are all created with dignity, baptized Christians in the name of the Holy Spirit, Jesus, and the Almighty Father," Tagle said. And the "Year of the Laity" is a very timely opportunity to fulfill this mission.

"Participation comes in two ways -- everyone gives, everyone receives...Participation in the Philippines means enabling the lay people to participate more fully in the life of the Church and its task of mission," Tagle said. "The vision of PCP II of a renewed church in the Philippines is a more active participation of the laity in the life and mission of the Church. Live a life of serving and following Christ in your respective [basic] communities," he added.⁸⁶⁵

The influence of our SCCs website is seen in this email message from the Philippines:

⁸⁶⁴ Orlando Quevedo in Joshua J. McElwee, "New Philippines Cardinal Calls for Church to Turn Toward Poor." *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR) Website, retrieved 25 February, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/news/global/new-philippines-cardinal-calls-church-turn-toward-poor>

⁸⁶⁵ See Luis Antonio Tagle's comments in **ADD**

I am Frater Joel L. Magpayo, a first year theologian at Saint John the Evangelist School of theology in Palo, Leyte, Philippines. One of the requirements of our school is to make a thesis proposal and it is done by a group. Our group's thesis is about the Basic Ecclesial Community (BEC). On the SCCs Website the "Timeline in the History and Development of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa" is parallel to our on-going thesis. I would like to ask more information about your work especially on how to organize well Small Christian Communities and their effectiveness.⁸⁶⁶

Very effective coordination in Asia takes place through the AsIPA (Asian Integral Pastoral Approach) of FABC. Max Stetter describes a National SCC Rally in Sri Lanka:

Hundreds of enthusiastic SCC members from many dioceses came to Colombo Basilica, Our Lady of Lanka. They were waiting outside the cathedral until we, the delegates of 15 Asian countries and some representatives from Europe and South Africa, arrived. A band accompanied us to the basilica, which was filled to capacity in minutes. The Cardinal of Sri Lanka, a staunch supporter of SCCs and the AsIPA (Asian Integral Pastoral Approach), presided over the Eucharist joined by a good number of bishops and very many priests. After mass, there was the rally with witnesses to *jumuiya* life, plays, songs and dances. All in all, a wonderful experience of a new face of the church that the rest of the world can learn from.⁸⁶⁷

A positive influence of the SCCs model in Asia is seen in the growth and spread of the Parish Evangelization Cell System (PECS) whose roots are in a model that came from a Pentecostal Korean cell church and has been adapted for Catholic parishes and life in USA, Italy, England and other countries. Its cell method is now established on five continents and there are many thousands of evangelization cells in Catholic parishes across the world. For example, PECS turned St Eustorgio Parish in Milan, Italy from a moribund inner city parish with fewer than 100 massgoers into a vibrant community with 1,000 people (about 60 per cent of the parish) involved in 150 weekly cell meetings with a multitude of outreaches.

PECS groups differ from other parish small groups in that they are part of the built-in structure of the parish. The cell leaders share in the pastoral ministry and responsibility of the parish priest and have regular feedback and meetings with him. Each cell, which operates for the members like an extended family, creates a sense of belonging. Here prayer, practical help and evangelization are encouraged through the personal witness of the cell members.

Cell members are motivated to evangelize their *oikos* (the ancient Greek equivalent of a household, house or family) through one-to-one Faith-sharing and service. Family, friends, neighbors and work colleagues are then invited to participate in a local cell and experience the joy of Christian

⁸⁶⁶ Joel L. Magpayo in an email message to the author dated 30 July, 2011.

⁸⁶⁷ Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved 24 October, 2012, <https://www.facE-book.com/pages/Small-Christian-Communities/279921983315>

fellowship. This model of people meeting in their homes for worship, teaching and fellowship is not something new; it was what Christians did for the first 300 years of Christianity (see *Romans* 16:4-5⁸⁶⁸).”⁸⁶⁹

Another learning from Asia is the growing importance of Basic Human Communities (BHCs), also referred to as Basic Human (Neighborhood) Communities, in the context of challenges faced by SCCs/BECs in interreligious dialog. Asia is the cradle of the world's major religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. It is the birthplace of many other spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Sikhism and Shintoism. Millions also espouse traditional or tribal religions, with varying degrees of structured ritual and formal religious teaching.

Basic Human Communities promote Neighborhood Human Communities (NHCs) with people of all religions and thus promote inter-religious harmony. The focus is on the dialog of life rather than one particular religion's sacred scriptures like the *Bible*, *Torah* or *Koran*. These communities are particularly important and numerous in Asia where only 4.5% of the total population is Christian and less than 3% of the total population is Catholic.

The VII Asian Integral Pastoral Approach (AsIPA) General Assembly in October, 2015 stated:

Besides strengthening the already existing SCCs/BECs, there is a need to form and encourage Basic Human Communities (BHCs) that can be a powerful means for communal peace and harmony and help us to move from religiosity to spirituality in action (*FABC Papers*, No. 48, 1987).⁸⁷⁰

Through the Federation of Asian Bishops Conference (FABC)⁸⁷¹ African SCCs are getting better known in Asia and Oceania. When three visitors from Melbourne, Australia met Cardinal Polycarp Pengo at Msimbazi Parish in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in March, 2005

⁸⁶⁸ The greeting after “to Prisca [Priscilla] and Aquila” says: “Greet all the churches at their house.” The footnote in *The African Bible* says: “This formula does not confirm the existence of house churches alongside of or in opposition to the Local Church. The Local Church in NT times was the house church because the faithful came together in private houses. A house church is the place for personal assimilation of God's Word, for some kind of liturgy and for intimate communication among Christians.” *The African Bible*, Nairobi: Paulines Africa, 1999, p. 1908.

⁸⁶⁹ Kristina Cooper, “From the Cell to the World,” *Tablet*, Vol. 269, No. 9107 (4 July, 2015), p. 18, *Tablet* Website, retrieved on 4 July, 2015, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/downloadpdf/040715issue.pdf>. The article recommends: “Consider joining a PEC or some other kind of Small Christian Community group to share your faith.”

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⁸⁷¹ As Fidei Donum priests and later as bishops in South Africa, Bishop Oswald Hirmer and Bishop Fritz Lobinger did remarkable missionary ministry in promoting the Lumko SCC Methods and Materials in Asia. Later they animated a revival of SCCs in Germany.

they explained that they had come from Australia to observe and learn about the way that the parishes of Dar es Salaam connect SCCs and the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA or the adult catechumenate). Pengo beamed. His response was immediate: “It is good that we can be missionaries from Africa to the world!”⁸⁷²

The bond between the SCCs in Eastern Africa and India is seen in many ways including the emphasis on SCCs as local family units and a communion of families. Lobinger reports:

From 19 to 21 November, 2013 the First National Convention of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) was held in Goa, India. It was the culmination of 40 years of systematic efforts to build up SCCs. The bishops of India could proudly state at the Opening Mass that there are now 68,000 SCCs in the 120 dioceses in India that now has 14 million Catholics. The Bishops Conference of India supports SCCs and over 70 bishops were present at the convention. The cardinal and the bishops did not come alone but came with delegates of their SCCs and with some of their priests. Seven thousand leaders of SCCs were present.⁸⁷³

This is also a challenge for us to have similar national meetings in the AMECEA Region. Another challenge is to have a National Service Team for SCCs headed by a committed bishop such as in India. The continuing support of the Indian bishops for SCCs is an inspiration. The final communiqué of the 31st Assembly of the Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI), held at Palai, Kerala from 5 to 13 February, 2014 states: “In the internal dynamics of the church, the bishops intend to enhance “the Small Christian Communities born in many places, rooted in the Word and in the Eucharist” that “are a sign of vitality and an instrument of formation and evangelization.”⁸⁷⁴

In summary, worldwide SCCs networking and sharing is illustrated on the SCCs Website (described in Chapter 9) and in the book *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment* that has editions printed in the United States, Africa and India as well as a digital version (Ebook). The book has separate sections on Latin America, North America, Europe, Africa, Asia and International. The “Dedication” reads: “To Christian leaders around the world who have committed themselves for many years to Small Christian Communities as a prophetic new way of being church, especially José Marins, Carolee Chanona, and Teo Trevisan in Latin America, Bob Pelton in North America, Ian Fraser, Jim

⁸⁷² “We Can be Missionaries from Africa to the World,” African Story No. 529 in the “African Stories Database”, African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved on 21 July, 2011, [http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid\[0\]=616](http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-database.html?task=display2&cid[0]=616)

⁸⁷³ Fritz Lobinger, “Celebrating the First National Convention of Small Christian Communities in India,” Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 26 December, 2013, <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/asia/india/266-celebrating-the-first-national-convention-of-small-christian-communities-in-india.html>

⁸⁷⁴ “ASIA/INDIA - “To Be Truly a Church of the Poor:” The Final Message of the Assembly of Bishops,” *International Fides News Service*, 14 February, 2014, Email message dated 14 February, 2014.

O'Halloran, and Peter Price in Europe, Christopher Mwoleka (deceased) in Africa, and Jim Cranswick in Oceania.

A thought about the possible future influence of Small Christian Communities on our World Church. SCCs are not specifically mentioned in the documents of the Second Vatican Council, but are clearly implied. SCCs are not specifically mentioned in the revised *1983 Code of Canon Law*, but are indirectly referred to in the section on “Structures” under the “People of God.” The Particular Churches (Local Churches) have the freedom to carry out pastoral work in parishes on the local level following their own structures and activities. This is described as the ordering of the parish on the most local levels. Canons 515-516 state:

A parish is a certain community of the Christian faithful stably constituted in a Particular Church, whose pastoral care is entrusted to a pastor (*parochus*) as its proper pastor (*pastor*) under the authority of the diocesan bishop. It is only for the diocesan bishop to erect, suppress, or alter parishes. He is neither to erect, suppress, nor alter notably parishes, unless he has heard the presbyteral council. A legitimately erected parish possesses juridic personality by the law itself.

Unless the law provides otherwise, a quasi-parish is equivalent to a parish; a quasi-parish is a definite community of the Christian faithful in a Particular Church, entrusted to a priest as its proper pastor but not yet erected as a parish because of particular circumstances. When certain communities cannot be erected as parishes or quasi-parishes, the diocesan bishop is to provide for their pastoral care in another way.⁸⁷⁵

Also lay people (Christ’s Faithful”) may freely establish and direct associations. Important canons are: 204; 215; 230; 298; 372-374; and 517-518.

Just as the Universal Church has Universal Canon Law, the bishops, dioceses and parishes have Particular Law:

Next to the pope, the bishops united in local councils, and each of them individually, are sources of law for their common or particular territory; canons of national or provincial councils, and diocesan statutes, constitute local law. At the present day and for a long time past, the law has laid down clearly the powers of local councils and of bishops.⁸⁷⁶

Different weight is given to the results/legislation of Diocesan Synods and other juridical mechanisms that create church laws on the local level. There are

Canons
Decisions
Directions

⁸⁷⁵ *Code of Canon Law, Vatican Website, retrieved on 8 March, 2014, http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG1104/_INDEX.HTM*

⁸⁷⁶ “Sources of Canon Law,” *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Wikipedia, retrieved 6 August, 2013, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canon_law_\(Catholic_Church\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canon_law_(Catholic_Church))

Directory
 Guidelines
 Mandates
 Policies
 Recommendations
 Regulations
 Statutes

Three examples of Particular Law in Africa: In its pastoral planning and coordination that emphasizes SCCs Blomfontein Archdiocese in South Africa states: "If the pastor in a parish with active SCCs is transferred, there is an archdiocesan policy that his successor should also be committed to SCCs." The booklet on the Synod of Mwanza Archdiocese in Tanzania in 2002 contains 105 references to *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo za Kikristo* (JNNK), the Swahili expression for SCCs. The *Pastoral Guidelines for the Archdiocese of Nairobi 2013* state: "All Christian faithful in the Archdiocese of Nairobi should be members of SCCs."

Tanzanian canon lawyer Father Augustine Mringi (who died in 2001) states:

By directing that the traditional parish should be composed of Small Christian Communities the AMECEA Bishops [in 1979] are simply saying that Canon Law should not continue to take the traditional parish as the basic juridical unit of the Church, because it has now become an association of the communities of the Christian faithful and is no longer a "a community of Christian faithful" in the primary sense of community. The parish priest is now a coordinator and animator of a community of internally self-governing communities.

The Small Christian Communities in the parish are now in reality the actual centers of pastoral work, from which all basic ecclesial activities commence and receive their validity and strength. On this account, the Small Christian Community has *de facto* become a "juridic person" because it is internally autonomous in the sense that it elects its own leaders, raises its own funds for self-support and promotes its own evangelization and catechesis. Thus the *Code of Canon Law* is challenged to recognize this *fait accompli* and formally include Small Christian Communities in the structures of the church.⁸⁷⁷

English diocesan priest Father Gerry Proctor states that while there is no explicit mention of SCCs in the code, "those of us involved in developing this level of being church can find a number of significant references which will give some solidity and juridical basis to all we are doing."⁸⁷⁸ He goes on to explain:

⁸⁷⁷ Augustine Mringi, "Small Christian Communities and Canon Law," in *Communio at the Grassroots: Small Christian Communities*, Bangalore: Indian Institute of Spirituality, 1995, pp. 326-327.

⁸⁷⁸ Gerry Proctor, "BECs/SCCs Both Spirit and Law," *Buena Vista Ink*, 18:5 (Sept/Oct 2004) and 18:6 (Nov/Dec 2004).

“The code appears to encourage a different model of church, where each Catholic is aware of their ‘right’ and recognizes their ‘duty’ to become active members at their local level bringing the message of salvation to every person without exception. It is the BEC process that most appears to be enabling the Local Church to realize this new model envisaged by the code...There is a rich seam of pastoral theology underpinned by the code that has been little explored to date.”⁸⁷⁹

Democratic Republic of the Congo diocesan priest Father Dieudonné Ngona points to the future in a commentary called “Towards a Juridic Status of the SCCs:”

The SCCs can be considered “churches” not in themselves, but as most basic localizations or furthestmost prolongations of the Universal Church through the mediation of the diocese and of the parish to which they are to be open or better, within which they have to be formed and operate...We need to live the experience of SCCs with success. If the experience could be lived successful, it would certainly be sanctioned later on. In fact, life always come first. Other provisions, be they juridic or other, follow.⁸⁸⁰

Ngona goes on to say:

SCCs have been made a pastoral priority by our Bishops’ Conferences. And they have the competence to do so, on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity. Furthermore when they are formed or established, the coming up of SCCs inevitably has an influence on the pastoral activities of the parish. Thus SCCs have juridic implications.⁸⁸¹

Nigerian Canon Lawyer Father Cosmas Aluede Ojemen states:

The structure of the parish is not static. It is evolving in an ongoing manner accepting inputs from different parts of the world. Recent papal documents recognize that the Principle of Subsidiarity implies accepting genuine initiative of Local Churches disperses around the world...The establishment of Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) is one area where the church is experiencing some renewal in the parish today. Since Vatican

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸⁰ Dieudonné Ngona, “The Small Christian Communities and the Internal Organization of the Local Churches: A Juridical Point of View,” *African Christian Studies*, Vol.19, No.3 (2003), pp. 11-12. Ngona writes on this subject at length in his book *Small Christian Communities, A Source of Renewal for Parish Life: A Theological-Canonical Approach*, Nairobi: St Joseph Printing Press, 1995. It is important that such books on SCCs are printed and made available widely.

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.12.

Council II there has been greater recognition for this informal way of structuring the parish to effect greater pastoral results.⁸⁸²

So hopefully a future revision of the *Code of Canon Law* will specifically mention SCCs and the SCCs Model of Church. We in Eastern Africa feel that our model of pastoral, parish-based SCCs from below is a new pastoral structure within a Communion of Communities Ecclesiology. A network of SCCs on the grassroots is a new way of being parish. Already some changes are happening. Years ago the diocesan statistical reports sent yearly to the Vatican did not include the number of SCCs and the lay ministries coming from SCCs. Now the reports cover this growing part of church life. Today there are over 180,000 Small Christian Communities in the nine AMECEA countries in Eastern Africa. Tanzania alone has over 60,000 SCCs. Kenya alone has over 45,000 SCCs. In part these numbers are calculated from the many dioceses and parishes in Eastern Africa's detailed statistics on the names, numbers and activities of SCCs that are sent annually to the Vatican. These statistics are also used as part of the bishop's every five-year report during his *Ad Limina* visit.

In light of the evaluation of SCCs and their future importance there is a very challenging article called "Analyzing the Present Moment: Latin American BECs in 2004" compiled by Proctor on behalf of the José Marins Team. After nine years its critique and insights are still very relevant to the future of the World Church:

The Second Vatican Council gave the church an extraordinary breath of fresh theological and ecclesiological life, but failed completely to create the new structures necessary to maintain this development... This trend was particularly noticeable in the absence since 1985 of any reference in magisterial statements to church as the People of God. There had been a greater stress on hierarchy, an increase in clericalism, an undermining of the collegiality of bishops... It was a curious moment when the [Latin American] BECs felt themselves to be the ones who were faithful to the council, obedient to the Magisterium, and defending the re-structuring of the Latin American Church achieved at Medellín (1968), Puebla (1979) and Santo Domingo (1992). It is possible that this was the only church to respond to Vatican II by creating new structures corresponding to the new theology. Their ecclesial intuition has been under attack ever since, and yet the BECs continue to be the major source of renewal in the church at the grassroots level. This expression of church at the base is a genuine experience of communion and participation.⁸⁸³

In a recent message Proctor states:

One of the things little written about in English is the reflection on the BECs being a structure of Catholic Church particularly in way they are

⁸⁸² Cosmas Aluede Ojemen, "The Parish as the Primary Place for the Mission of the Church in Africa," *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 55, Nos 1 & 2 (March-June, 2013), pp. 64, 68-69.

⁸⁸³ Gerry Proctor in Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton (eds.), *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005 and Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006, pp. 32-33.

described by CELAM in their major documents as noted in the article I wrote. However, that structure was actually put into Canon Law in a number of dioceses by the creation of diocesan laws/regulations (sometimes after Diocesan Synods) which incorporated the pastoral option of the diocese into a fully legitimate recognition by the Local Church of the agreed theological/pastoral position of the continental church as expressed by the episcopal conferences. This happened in Mexico and the Dominican Republic, for example. I met bishops/priests/BEC leaders in those dioceses, but little was known and even less written down about these choices because of the desire not to bring them to the attention of the Vatican because of the fear of renewed persecution.⁸⁸⁴

Fortunately, Pope Francis is bringing new winds of change. In a talk on “Some Temptations Against Missionary Discipleship” during the 2013 World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in July, 2013 he said: “The spread of Bible study groups, of ecclesial basic communities and of Pastoral Councils is in fact helping to overcome clericalism⁸⁸⁵ and to increase lay responsibility.”⁸⁸⁶

Reflecting on SCCs as a pastoral structure in the Catholic Church the following anecdote from the Introduction to the “International Section” of the book *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment* is significant:

⁸⁸⁴ Gerry Proctor in an email message to the author, 17 June, 2013.

It is noteworthy that Peruvian theologian Father Gustavo Gutiérrez, OP, a great supporter of SCCs/CEBs and their close link to “the preferential option for the poor,” has been investigated and criticized by the Vatican over the years. Yet in 2014 he was welcomed back to Rome in a rehabilitation/redemption of sorts. His “updated Liberation Theology” has been supported and promoted by Cardinal Gerhard Mueller, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. In fact, they have written a book together *On the Side of the Poor* to be published by Orbis Books in Spring, 2015. This bodes well for the Vatican support of SCCs/CEBs. Pope Francis’ language is even stronger when he says that for the Catholic Church the option for the poor is a “must.”

⁸⁸⁵ Unfortunately, clericalism is still “alive and well” in Eastern Africa. An example is titles such as “Rev. Father,” “Rev. Sister,” “Rev. Brother” and “Rev. Professor.” Similarly are the holdovers from British colonialism and the judicial system such as titles for bishops such as “My Lord” and “Your Grace.” Pope Francis calls this being “self-reverential.” He is trying to steer the Catholic Church away from the hierarchical language of the cardinals being “Princes of the Church” to being servants of the People of God with Pope Francis himself being the servant of the servants. Many times, the pope has called for “pastoral bishops, not princes.”

⁸⁸⁶ Francis, “Address of Pope Francis to the Coordinating Committee of CELAM, the Latin American Bishops’ Conference, 28 July, 2013.” WYD Central Website, retrieved on 29 July, 2013, http://wydcentral.org/pope-francis-meeting-with-the-coordinating-committee-of-celam/?fb_comment_id=fbc_1403649499846873_67169_1403771713167985#f1720970793522c

In January, 1986 Joe Healey participated in the South African Missiological Conference in Pretoria, South Africa. The keynote speaker of the congress was Hans Küng. Joe gave a lecture on "Basic Christian Communities: Church-Centered or World-Centered?" mainly from the pastoral experience of SCCs in Eastern Africa. After his talk he received a message that Hans Küng wanted to see him at the next coffee break. Küng explained that in his latest research he had been studying different paradigms of the church: House Churches in the First Century, monasteries in medieval times, the parish in recent centuries. Küng wondered if the parish model was no longer appropriate in different places in the world, and if the model or paradigm of the future is the Small Christian Community (SCC)? Joe has often wondered if this was prophetic. Prophetic in the sense that Yves Congar's quote in the "Foreword" in the same book by Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor is prophetic: "renewal in the church has come about, time and time again in its history, in and through the inspiration of small communities – monastic, evangelical, missionary, lay communities, communities of women – fired by the Holy Spirit".⁸⁸⁷

What is the new structure or model or paradigm? Clearly SCCs and the SCCs Model of Church are a significant part of a new way of being parish from below. Many Catholics (and others) around the world including SCC leaders are very hopeful in the changes being introduced by Pope Francis. He is using the expression "People of God" in his talks and is emphasizing more synodality (including various synod models), collegiality, collaboration, consultation and subsidiarity. We are optimistic that the experience of SCCs as a New Model of Church from below as witnessed by SCC members in Latin America, Africa and Asia⁸⁸⁸ will bring significant changes in new pastoral structures corresponding to our reading of the contemporary signs of the times, contemporary Communion Ecclesiology and the ecclesial reality on the local level.

⁸⁸⁷ Healey and Hinton, *Small Christian Communities Today*, p. 155.

⁸⁸⁸ To show how this is a worldwide phenomenon especially in the Global South, Korean diocesan priest Father Bartholomew Jun Won, pastor in Seoul, South Korea said: "The question of 'Is it possible to realize the pastoral care of SCCs in the Church in Korea?' sounds like an appeal for changing the paradigm of the Church in Korea, turning away from the long clericalism and secularism." He stressed that "we should consider the SCCs not as a solution that brings us some pastoral effectiveness, but as a pastoral vision for the local Church which realizes the spirit of the Second Vatican Council." This is a key insight that stresses the pastoral priority of SCCs in this new model of church." *International Fides News Service*, 22 June, 2013. Also published in CBCK News, "Priests' Workshop for Developing Small Christian Communities in Korea," Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 6 August, 2013, <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/asia/korea/250-priests-workshop-for-developing-small-christian-communities-in-korea.html>

Further background is explained in the excellent article by Bibiana Joo-hyun Ro on "Reflecting on Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Catholic Church of Korea" on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 2 July, 2013, <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/korea.pdf>

Here is a partial summary of an article on a March, 2017 Italian document (not available in English) by the International Theological Commission -- ITC (*Commissione Teologica Internazionale*) called *La Sinodalità Nella Vita E Nella Missione Della Chiesa*:

A problem that is hampering Pope Francis' efforts to facilitate greater synodality is the difficulty of Catholic theologians to give practical expression to the idea of *episcopal collegiality*, which was developed at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) and in the post-conciliar theological debates, and to the *ecclesial synodality* that a truly global Catholic Church needs. The introduction to the document roots the ecclesiology of synodality "in the footsteps of Vatican II," acknowledging the need to proceed further in the trajectory of the council (par. 8). The text paints an overly optimistic picture of the development of synodality in the post-Vatican II Church, but is silent about the frustration experienced these last 50 years regarding the demands and the need for synodality and collegiality at the universal, national, and local levels of the church (par. 41). It is also almost totally silent about the need to integrate synodality with new forms of Catholic life and ministry in the church; that is, the new lay ecclesial movements and new communities [here we can include the Small Christian Communities Model of Church]. It relies heavily on the episcopal ecclesiology of Vatican II and is therefore based on the parish and diocesan model that is not the model of the new movements and new communities — the new "creative minorities."⁸⁸⁹

Evolving and developing true synodality is seen in the context of reading the contemporary signs of the times. 2108 is very different from 1965 (end of Vatican II). The Catholic culture of 60-75 years ago is gone. This includes the increasing influence of culture and secularism from outside the church on pastoral solutions, decisions and changes inside the church.

It is important for visitors to Eastern Africa to share their experiences of SCCs in the AMECEA Region when they return to their home countries. American Catholic layman Dan Heuer sent his impressions of visiting St. Kizito Small Christian Community in Nairobi, Kenya to his friend and relatives:

After the Mass we accompanied Fr. Joe to a Small Christian Community meeting in a low income informal settlement housing area in Waruku. This was a very memorable experience. The group meets weekly in a different home each week. About twenty people were there in the small homemade of corrugated metal. The group members read scripture passages, shared thoughts and concerns, and prayed together for about two hours. The scripture reading is central to the discussion. After the reading there is a period of silence before the discussion continues. For Africans these meetings are not a project but are a "way of life." People freely share their lives in these group

⁸⁸⁹ Summarized from Massimo Faggioli, "The Uncertain Future of Synodality: Polarization and Ecclesial Paralysis," *La Croix International*, 11 June, 2018, *La Croix International* Website, retrieved 12 June, 2018, https://international.la-croix.com/news/the-uncertain-future-of-synodality/7790?utm_source=Newsletter&utm_medium=e-mail&utm_content=11-06-2018&utm_campaign=newsletter_crx_lci&PMID=471b333f614896b57f1beb62b72402ef

discussions. The groups are instrumental in identifying needs in the communities and developing ways to meet the needs.

Small Christian Communities are a staple of Christian life in Africa. There are 180,000 of them in Eastern Africa including 45,000 in Kenya. While providing a strong means of spirituality and support for Christians, they are also an important means to overcome tensions that might arise between people of different ethnic groups. Individuals from different ethnic groups form deep human relationships through the communities that help them transcend their differences. Some Small Christian Communities are based in schools and are oriented to students.

Some of the articles on SCCs in Africa have been translated into other world languages such as French, German, Italian, Polish and Spanish. These texts are available on the SCCs Website and through hyperlinks. Polish priest and canon lawyer Father Robert Lezohupski OFM Conv comments that an article in a Polish theological journal introduces SCCs to Polish readers and this a positive development.⁸⁹⁰

Visits to Europe and North America allow me to share the Eastern African experience with the rest of the world.

I was invited by Father Paul Steffen, SVD, a Professor in the Missiology Department at the Urbaniana University, to give input on “SCCs in Eastern Africa” in three of his classes:

1. “Seminar on Small Christian Communities” (“Un nuovo modo di essere Chiesa: il metodo Lumko in Africa, Asia ed Europa e sua promozione delle Piccole Comunità Cristiane”)
2. “Theology and Praxis of the Christian Community” (“Teologia e prassi della comunità Cristiana”)
3. “Contextual Practical Theology in a Missionary Perspective or Practical Theology of Evangelization” (“Teologia della pastorale missionaria”)

The students included two from Kenya (a sister from Nairobi Archdiocese and a priest from Isiolo Diocese), a priest from Tanzania and a priest from Ethiopia.

In Paterson Diocese in New Jersey, USA I have been asked to propose a design for a Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Workshop for parish teams of a priest and two members of the Parish Pastoral Team/Parish Pastoral Council. I have tried to respond to Pope Francis’s challenge to be “bold and creative.” The theme is: “Possible Models of Small Christian Communities in the Parishes of Paterson Diocese.” These are both English and Spanish-speaking parishes. The starting point is the unique situation/local context/pastoral plan of each parish.

⁸⁹⁰ Robert Lezohupski’s phone conversation with the author on 17 June, 2015.

At the same time the ideal is that all these small communities⁸⁹¹ meet **weekly** either in private homes, in religious centers or in the parishes. All of them are **lectionary-based SCCs**, that is, in the middle of the week the SCC members usually reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday.

Some models (alphabetically):

Bible Study SCC
 Christian Life Community (CLC)
 Contemplative Prayer SCC
 Ecumenical SCC
Lectio Divina SCC
 LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) SCC
 Men's SCC
 Neighborhood (geographical) SCC
 Online SCC
 Parish Pastoral Team SCC
 Youth Small Christian Community (YSCC)
 Women's SCC

The ideal is also that these SCCs be parish-based , that is, connected to the pastoral life and decision-making in the parish such as being directly represented on the Parish Pastoral Council. These SCCs are foundational to the parish. They are not optional small “groups” in the parish. Also, these SCCs have a practical action/social outreach component.

Key is contextualization. One size does not fit all. There is no cookie cutter design. There is no blueprint for building SCCs. This is the Catholic Church from below/from the grassroots/from the local pastoral priorities/from local felt needs.

These models are connected with many other small “groups:”

Book Clubs
 Christ Renews His Parish (and other parish renewal programs)

⁸⁹¹ The challenge is to create a successful “branding” of the name and meaning of Small Christian Communities. “Communities” is deeper and more focused than the generic “groups” that can cover everything. See multiple references in other parts of this book. In the Eastern Africa local context, “communities” has a deep social and cultural meaning connected to the family, clan and ethnic group.

“Christian” helps to give the SCC members and their SCCs a specific ecclesial identity. “Church” has a similar meaning in the name Small Christian Communities. SCCs’ ecclesial identity is connected to the Local Church especially the parish. Religious and pastoral activities are more important than social activities. In their weekly meetings SCC members emphasize the values of *Bible* reflection and Faith-sharing. A combined version is lectionary-based Faith-sharing.

Latin America has a similar experience where the common names are ecclesial names. Most common is Christian Ecclesial Communities (CEBs) and Christian Base Communities (CBCs).

Cornerstone
 Cursillo
 JustFaith
 Mothers Club
 RENEW (with its many programs and Modules)

This SCCs Workshop do not include traditional Small Prayer Groups and Small Apostolic Groups that have a different role and purpose in the parish.

A key part of the workshop is that the participants meet in small groups of 10 people to actually reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday (lectionary-based Faith-sharing).

Magesa's assessment is as follows:

What the prospects are in some dimensions of the [Catholic] Church in Africa is what we have been trying to gauge. What has happened there and what is to be expected? In conclusion, let us briefly identify and assess a few key points... There is an experience of change, seen most evidently in the growth and development of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) spreading across the continent. Where they have been established and are flourishing, "SCCs are an important pastoral strategy and even a new way of being a communitarian Church"⁸⁹² rather than a strictly hierarchical one. SCCs reflect a new way of being Church in Africa, a "restructuring process", whereby the Church arises from and is primarily based on the faith of the faithful, the *sensus fidei fidelium*. In this paradigm, ministries and pastoral action, although coordinated by the clergy and hierarchy for the sake of unity and order, begin and are galvanized here. It is at this level, where people are intimately connected, know one another, and help one another out, that the human face of the church reveals itself.

At the level of SCCs too, ministries arise motivated by real needs of the people. Because of this, lay formation is needed and has been undertaken in various local churches. An example is the establishment of pastoral and catechetical centers for the purpose. The responsibility for innovation is therefore not concentrated exclusively in the hands of the ordained ministry as was the case in the past, but is spread out among the faithful as the Spirit of God prompts, in line with a new emphasis on an ecclesiology of communion that the Second Vatican Council called for. The movement is in accord with Pope Francis's insistence on the necessity of "change of attitude" which involves the fight against "temptations" like "the ideologization of the Gospel message, the functionalism 'that reduces the reality of the Church to the structure of an NGO [a nongovernmental, nonprofit organization], where what is of value is the ascertainable result and statistics and clericalism.'" Of course,

⁸⁹² *Small Christian Communities Today*, 97.

the bishop as leader must lead, but Pope Francis insists that leading in the new ecclesiology “is not the same thing as giving orders.”⁸⁹³ ⁸⁹⁴

⁸⁹³ Elizabetta Pique, *Pope Francis: Life and Revolution – a Biography of Jorge Bergoglio*, Chicago: Loyola Press, 2013, 276.

⁸⁹⁴ Laurenti Magesa, *The Post-Conciliar Church in Africa: No Turning Back the Clock*, Nairobi: CUEA Press, 2016, 198-199.

9. The Future is Now: Using the Internet⁸⁹⁵ to Promote SCCs in Africa and Around the World

In the 60 year (1961-2021) history of AMECEA we have always been challenged to respond to the contemporary signs of the times. Today we have the growing importance of, the internet,⁸⁹⁶ cyberspace, blogosphere, websites, the digital arena, the social media/new media and social networking. There are interactive websites specifically about SCCs and referring to SCCs in Africa⁸⁹⁷ and many other online SCCs resources. A quick summary of the resources to promote SCCs in Eastern Africa and around the world is as follows:

⁸⁹⁵ On 22 April 2017 putting “Small Christian Communities” in the Google Search Engine box, our SCCs Website comes up first. Putting “Small Christian Communities” in the Facebook Search Engine box, our SCCs Facebook Page comes up first.

⁸⁹⁶ Kenya is leading Africa in internet penetration with over 30 million people having access to the internet, according to a report. The report by Jumia Business Intelligence and GSMA Mobile titled “White Paper 2017: Trends from the Kenyan Smartphone and E-Commerce Industry,” shows that 67 per cent of the population in Kenya is classified as internet users. This in absolute numbers translates to 31.99 million internet users going by the current projected Kenyan population of about 48.31 million people. This means that two in every three Kenyans have access to the internet.

This is way better than the average African internet penetration where only 18 per cent of the total African population defined as internet users.

In what Sam Chappatte, Jumia Kenya Country Manager, calls “the democratization of smartphones’ this trend has been largely driven by a reduction in average price of smartphones with the price of a smartphone having more than halved from Sh23,100 (231 dollars) in 2013 to Sh9,700 (97 dollars) in 2016 with the lowest price smartphone currently being sold on Jumia X-Tigi P3, a 4 inch phone, at Sh2,799 (28 dollars).

Daily Nation, 20 April, 2017, accessed on 20 April, 2017,
<http://www.nation.co.ke/news/Internet-access-grows-in-Kenya/1056-3895304-format-xhtml-75ovt9z/index.html>

⁸⁹⁷ Some examples by diocese, deanery, parish, SCC are:

Arua Diocese, Uganda (<http://www.tualu.org/ARUA%20DIOCESE/index.htm>);

Jinja Diocese, Uganda (jinja-diocese.org)

Karonga Diocese, Malawi (<http://www.karongadiocese.org>)

Kitui Catholic Diocese, Kenya (<https://dioceseofkitui.org>)

Malindi Catholic Diocese, Kenya (<http://www.malindicatholicdiocese.org>)

Marsabit Diocese, Kenya (<http://marsabitdiocese.org>)

Meru Diocese, Kenya (<https://catholicdioceseofmeru.org>)

Meru Diocese, Kenya -- Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Official Website (<https://minsccs.org>)

Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya (<http://www.archdioceseofnairobi.or.ke>)

Ngong Diocese, Kenya (<http://ngongcatholic.org>). See "Strategic Plan 2016-2020" of the Catholic Diocese of Ngong.

Exodus Kutoka Network: Catholic Parishes Network in Informal Settlements in Nairobi, Kenya (<http://www.kutoka.org> and <http://www.kutokanet.com/content.html>);

Christ the Teacher Parish (Catholic Chaplaincy Center) at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya has a drop-down menu that includes web pages for the eight SCCs in the residence halls and one SCC off campus (<http://www.kucatholic.or.ke>);

Christ the King Catholic Church, Kibera, Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya <http://christthekingkibera.org/>

Holy Family Minor Basilica, Archdiocese of Nairobi, Kenya <http://www.holyfamilybasilica.info>

Holy Ghost Cathedral, Mombasa Archdiocese, <http://holyghostcathedral.org>

Holy Trinity Catholic Parish, Kariobangi North, Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya (<http://www.holytrinitykariobangi.org>). The parish is divided into four Zones under three Mass Centres. Each Mass Centre has a number of Small Christian Communities: In the Western Zone we have St. Daniel Comboni with 18 Small Christian Communities. In the same direction we have Huruma Zone with 10 small Christian Communities. The Central Zone, where the main Church is situated, has 20 Small Christian Communities. The Eastern Zone comprises of St. John's Church-Korogocho with 26 Small Christian Communities

Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Adams Arcade, Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya <http://www.guadalupeparishke.org>

Regina Caeli (Our Lady Queen of Heaven) Catholic Church, Karen, Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya <http://reginacaelikaren.org>

Shrine of Mary Help of Christians, Don Bosco Catholic Church, Upper Hill, Nairobi City, Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya <http://www.donboscochurch.org>

St. Austin's Catholic Church, Nairobi City, Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya <http://staustinschurch.or.ke>

S. Ignatius Catholic Church, Lusaka, Zambia <https://www.facebook.com/pages/St-Ignatius-Church/535505633183153>

St. Joseph Catholic Church Diani Ukunda, Mombasa Archdiocese, Kenya <http://www.ukundacatholicparish.com/index.php/ministries/the-small-christian-communities>

St. Joseph Catholic Parish, Tudor, Mombasa Archdiocese, Kenya (23 SCCs of which five have their own web pages) (<http://tudorcatholic.org/index.php/what-is-new-in-1-5550266308>);

St. Joseph's Parish, Namitembo and St. Bridget Parish Website, Zomba, Malawi <http://www.stbridgetchurch.org/namitembo.htm>

St. Mary Magdalene Parish, Kariokor, Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya http://stmarymagdalenekariokor.com/?page_id=12

St. Patrick's Catholic Parish, Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi (http://stpatricksmalawi.org/main.php?page_id=Mphakati).

St. Augustine SCC, Karen, Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya http://cathparishkaren.com/?page_id=24

Christ the King SCC, St. Joseph Kanyama Parish, Lusaka Archdiocese, Zambia (made up of Catholics of Rwandese origins. It was initiated by the then Lusaka Archbishop, the late Joseph Cardinal Mazombwe, in 1997 in order to save souls of the first asylum seekers in Zambia that were found in Kanyama being the most affordable Lusaka township) <http://ikazeiwacu.fr/2013/11/24/the-christ-the-king-small-christian-community-of-st-joseph-kanyama-parish-of-lusaka-archdiocese-has-celebrated-rhe-christ-the-king-feast-on-this-sunday-in-lusaka>

Antivirus Programs: AVG CloudCare Antivirus, Kaspersky, Webroot.
 Archives: WayBack Machine, a digital archive that allows people to see websites as they existed at various points in time.
 Browsers: Google Chrome, Internet Explorer, Lockdown, Microsoft Edge, Mozilla Firefox, Opera Mini, Safari, Torch.
 Celebrations: Kudoboard.
 Content change detection and notification service/content delivery network (CDN) service (monitor web for interesting new content): Google Alert. CloudFront.
 Content Management Systems (CMSs): Drupal, Joomla, Mailchimp, Wiki, WordPress.
 Delivery Systems: UPS SurePost.
 Ebook format: PDF or EPUB.
 Ebook Readers: Amazon Kindle, Barnes and Noble Nook, Kobo, Sony.
 Editing: BookBaby, Track Changes.
 Email messages: AOL, Oath.
 Event management and marketing software: Whova.
 Group email discussion list/electronic mailing list: Listserv.
 Integrated employee experience platform: Microsoft Viva.
 Learning software platforms/Learning management systems/Teaching platforms: Canvas, BBB, Blackboard, Goggle Classroom, Moodle, Sakai, Zoom.
 Mobile Messaging and Calling App (with video calls): Facebook Messenger, WeChat, WhatsApp.
 Networks: Kenya Education Network (KENET).
 Note Taking: Google Keep, One Note.
 Online Bookshelf: VitalSource.
 Online payment system: Facebook Pay, Google Pay, PayPal, Pioneer.
 Online Surveys/Polls: SurveyMonkey, 360Reach, Tripetto, WP-Polls plugin.
 Operating Systems: Windows (many versions)
 Photo services: Google Photo, Open Space, PhotoShelter, PhotoStick, Portal, Shutterfly, WeTransfer.
 Presentation app: Google Slides, PowerPoint.
 Publishing platforms: CreateSpace.
 Remote Tech Support: Alpinebiz, Quick Assist (Microsoft Tech Support) TeamViewer (Charles Gikera).
 Router: Safaricom “Fiber Home” 4G WiFi Router (like a hotspot),
 Search engines: Ask, Bing, Firefox, Google Chrome,⁸⁹⁸ Microsoft Edge, Opera, Yahoo.
 Social media and social networking⁸⁹⁹websites/platforms/applications (apps),

⁸⁹⁸ Google has become a sort of an oracle of the information age. Today many Catholic parishioners consult Google for information rather than parish priests or catechists on such topics as Catholic Church laws, the sacraments. The Liturgical Calendar, etc. Websites such as Wikipedia and the local parish or diocese are also frequently consulted.

A search on Google for the exact words “Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa” on 8 November, 2015 produced 1,120 results (hits or references).

⁸⁹⁹ At the beginning of 2014 there were more than 1.5 billion Africans on social media. Africa has the fast growing smartphone market in the world. In 2012 an estimated million people use social media in Kenya, such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace and WhatsApp. It is

messaging apps/services/tools/plugins: AOL, Bot, Botox, Boxbe, Instant Messenger, Blogspot, Buzzfeed, ChatOn, Clubhouse, Facebook, Facebook Live, Facebook Messenger, Facetime, Flickr, Google+, Google Duo, Google Drive, Google Groups (online forums and email-based groups that shares documents, pictures, calendars, invitations and other resources), Google Hangouts, Google Jamboard, Google Meet, Google News, Instagrams, Imo, iBook, iTunes, LinkedIn, Messages, MySpace, Patch, Periscope, Pinterest, Quibi, Quora, Reddit, Signal, Siri, Skype, Slack, Snapchat, SOUND CLOUD, Spotify, Supfrica, Tango, Telegam, Telegram Messenger, Tidal, Tumblr, Twitch, Twitter, Yahoo Chat, YouTube, Viadeo, Viber, Vimeo, Vine, Viv, WeChat, WhatsApp, WhatsApp Chat, WhatsApp Messenger, Zoom.⁹⁰⁰

Spreadsheets: Google Sheets, Microsoft Excel.

Storage (file hosting service): Dashlane, Dropbox, Google Drive, Mega, Moodle, YouTube.

Tool for converting videos: Handbrake.

Video Calling/Video Conferencing/Video Meetings/Real-time Meetings/Real-Communications Technology: Blue Jeans, Bright Talk, Cisco WebEx, Facebook, FaceTime, Google Hangouts, Google Meet, GoToMeetings, GoToWebinar, MeSkype, Microsoft Teams, Owl, Skype, WhatsApp, Zoom.

Video Editors: Movavi.

Video Transcoder: Handbrake.

Virtual/digital (smartphone) personal assistant: Buzby, Cortana, Google Now, Okay Google, Siri.

Virtual event platform: Hopin.

Other internet resources/applications (apps)/platforms (in alphabetical order):

Audio CD, apps (special applications),⁹⁰¹

Bible App, blog posts, blogs, bots, cellphones, chat rooms, Christian prayer apps, Chromebooks, cloud, cloud computing, cloud computing systems, comment box,

Dashboard, databases, data storage, digital files, discussion forums, domain-based email, Dropbox, DSpace, dumb phones, DVDs,

Ebook readers, Ebrary, Elibrary, email mailing lists, email messages, Ereaders (also written as e-reader, e-book reader, e-book device),

the eagerness to interact in social media that drives the start of internet usage. The Communication Commission of Kenya shows that there are currently 14.3 million internet users in Kenya, which increased from 12.5 million. Also, 36.3 per cent of the population has access to the internet, increasing from 31.8 per cent. This growth is attributed to the spread of mobile phones throughout the country.

⁹⁰⁰ Zoom unifies cloud video conferencing, simple online meetings, and cross platform group chat into one easy-to-use platform.

⁹⁰¹ Two examples are: The PopeApp. The Missio Phone App, the first official App for the Vatican, created by the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) and FIDES. Missio is the perfect Catholic app for staying up-to-date on the latest Catholic news from the Vatican and around the world.

Facebook Messenger, Facetime, facetime(s) with, feature phone, fiber-optic cable, flipdocs, fonepad,
 Google AdSense, Google Chat, Google Docs, Google Glass, Google Keep (note taking service), Google Sheets, Google Slides, group chat apps,
 handheld mobile devices,
 instant messaging, instapray, institutional repositories, intercloud, internet domains, internet enabled phones, internet meetings, internet TV, iPads, iPhones, iPods,
 Li-Fi, list-servs,
 Massive Online Open Course (MOOC), message boards, messaging platforms, microblogs, MissioApp, mobile broadband, mobile data services, mobile devices, mobile networks, mobile phone app, mobile networks, mobile phone services, mobile service providers, mobile virtual network operators (MVNO), mobile web,
 net book, networking, networks,
 office messaging app, online book, online chat, online distant learning sites,⁹⁰² online journals, online locker, online messaging app, online Powerpoint presentations, online storage, Patch, phablets, Photo Shop, platforms, plug-ins, podcasts (digital audio file), PopeApp, portable Wi-Fi, PrayerMate,
 Quick Response (QR) Readers,
 radio live streams/streaming,
 Scribd, selfies, Skype, smart cards, smartphones, smartwatches, smsing, Snapchat, social media apps, social media platforms, social network, social networking, spiritual apps, tablet PC, tablets, teen internet, text chat, text messaging (also called texting, Short Message Services [SMS], Multimedia Messages [MMS]), the Net, touchphone, touch screen devices, Tutor, twar, twitting⁹⁰³
 Y phone,
 VCDs, Video CD, video clips, videosharing, videotelephony, Vine, Viper, virtual book, virtual memoir, virtual rosary/mobile rosary, vlogs, voice-activated software, voice app,
 WEB 2.0, WEB 3.0, webcasts, web conferences, web conferencing, weblog, web seminars, webinars, webinar software applications, webliography, WiFi hotspot, wiki, Wikipedia, wireless network.

We have a new language such as:

“access rights,”
 “access technology,”
 “actions that stress the server,”
 “active networkers,”
 “active networking,”
 “active online presence.”

⁹⁰² The Loyola Institute for Ministry at Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA has a LIMEX Program that includes two online specialization courses on Small Christian Community Formation: “The Inner Life of Small Christian Communities” and “The Public Life of Small Christian Communities.” <http://lim.loyno.edu/onsite>

⁹⁰³ Some SCCs have their own internal communications networks: Email Addresses, Email Mailing Lists, text messaging (also called texting, Short Message Services [SMS], MMS messages) networks such as the John Paul I SCC SMS Link in St. Ignatius Parish, Lusaka Archdiocese, Zambia.

“activeSync,”
 “adaptive fast charging travel charger/compatible device,”
 “Ad blocker,”
 “add-ons,”
 “Africa’s data revolution,”
 “age of clickbait,”
 “age of connectivity,”
 “algorithm tweaking,”
 “algorithmic marketplace,”
 “AI-powered search engine,”
 “all digital access,”
 “all-digital workflow and production process,”
 “all-knowing digital helper,”
 “aluminosilicate glass screen,”
 “always-now world of social media,”
 “Amazon’s algorithm,”
 “Amazon’s Hub Group distribution system,”
 “Android App development,”
 “Analog Cardinal vis-a-vis Digital Cardinal,”
 “anchor text,”
 “app development,”
 “app driving via waze,”
 “app ecosystem,”
 “app fatigue,”
 “app-like site,”
 “app-powered service companies,”
 “app’s algorithm,”
 “apps culture,”
 “application to optimize a document for viewing,”
 “artificial technology software,”
 “magic of audiobooks,”
 “audio platforms,”
 “audio publishing,”
 “augmented reality,”
 “augmented reality smartphone game,”
 “augmented video app,”
 “authentication app,”
 “auto chat iPhone app,”
 “auto dial,”
 “auto pay,”
 “auto purged,”
 “auto renewal,”
 “automatic calendars,”
 “available live online,”
 “available online live,”
 “AVG CloudCare,”
 “background app refresh,”
 “background print,”
 “backlinks”—having your website name mentioned and hyperlinked by other
 websites,
 “balancing privacy and security in the digital age,”

“balcony church,”
“baptizing the digital world,”
“behind a paywall (you could not read it without subscribing),”
“better use technology to deepen relationships,”
“bibliographical manager,”
“binge listening,”
“bingeworthy,”
“bingeworthy TV,”
“biometric information,”
“biometrics registration,”
“biometric technology,”
“BIOS,”
“blacklisted,”
“blended format,”
“blended learning (combining online modules and on-campus learning),”
“blended virtual learning,”
“bloatware,”
“blockchain technology (bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies),”
“blocklist,”
“bloggers see things differently,”
“blogging,”
“blogging platform,”
“blog – online diary,”
“blog website,”
“blogsphere,”
“blogs – personal websites,”
“books on a flash drive,”
“Born Before Computers (BBC),”
“born digital,”
“bound galleys,”
“brand awareness,”
“brave new digital world,”
“breadcrumb trail,”
“bring the content of the Word of God to people who use digital means,”
“Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) Principle.”
“Bring Your Own Phone (BYOP) Activation Kit.”
“broadcast networks (NBC, etc.)
“broadcast on the internet,”
“broadcast TV (NBC, etc.)
“broad-scale digital counterinsurgency,”
“browser-based reading,”
“browser compatibility testing.”
“burner phone,”
“buy an app,”
“cable TV talk shows,”
“caller ID,”
“calls keep dropping,”
“capacity building,”
“captioned video,”
“capture (Google “I am not a robot”),
“casting,”

“casting the digital net,”
 “Catholic blogosphere,”
 “Catholic Church’s digital engagement,”
 “Catholic Church’s digital reality,”
 “Catholic Church’s media presence,”
 “Catholic Church’s online presence,”
 “Catholic Church Priority – web designer, programmer, developer,”
 “Catholic Metaverse,”
 “Catholic social media editors,”
 “Catholic Social Network Teaching,”
 “challenges of internet connectivity,”⁹⁰⁴
 “charging station,”
 “chat apps,”
 “cellphone cameras,”
 “cellphone charger dock.”
 “cellphone lot,”
 “cellphone ministry,”
 “cellphone technology,”
 “cellular bandwidth,”
 “central part of the church’s mission now,”
 “challenge of increasing traffic,”
 “check button,” (many choices)
 “chip reader,”
 “Christian crowdfunding sites,”
 “Christianity in a Digital Age,”
 “Christianity in the Digital Culture,”
 “citizen journalism,”
 “citizen journalists,”
 “church as field hospital in the digital media world,”
 “church-based online news agencies,”
 “church and communication in an e-age,”
 “Church Mobile App,”
 “clean air,”
 “clickbait,”
 “clickbait headlines,”
 “clickbait journalism (tracking celebrities),”
 “clickbait minefield,”
 “clickbait news stories,”
 “click-through activity,”
 “climate portal,”
 “cloud application,”
 “cloud backup,”
 “cloud backup provider,”
 “cloud-based,”
 “cloud-based hub,”

⁹⁰⁴ The adage of *the rich get richer and the poor get poorer* still hold true in many places in Africa. While active networking communities is the ideal, people in rural areas have poor or inconsistent connectivity. People without personal computers, tablets and advanced smartphones are severely limited in their communications capability.

“cloud-based software,”
 “cloud-based video conferencing service,”
 “cloud care,”
 “cloud computing,”
 “cloud gaming,”
 “Cloud HD,”
 “Cloud HD Video.”
 “Cloud HD Video Meeting,”
 “cloud hosting,”
 “cloud phone solution,”
 “cloud services (online storage),”
 “cloud storage,”
 “cloud video conferencing,”
 “coders/coding,”
 “code-switching,”
 “coding classes,”
 “collective cellphone memory capacity,”
 “combining text, voice and video,”
 “communal, household computer,”
 “communicating thru YOUCAT (short for *Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church*),”
 “communication hub,”
 “communication platforms,”
 “communication tools,”
 “compatibility (forward, backward, downward).”
 “compatible with all mobile devices,”
 “competitive keyword phrases.”
 “comprehensive, multidisciplinary full-text database,”
 “computer algorithm,”
 “computer-generated,”
 “computer-generated imagery,”
 “computer instruction,”
 “computer technology field,”
 “Computer Vision,”
 “connected devices talking to each other,”
 “consciousness of information technology,”
 “consecrated life in the digital age,”
 “constant digital connectedness,”
 “consumer culture of Facebook ‘friendships’”
 “containment measures,”
 “content driven,”
 “content optimization,”
 “content provider,”
 “content-rich apps,”
 “content writing,”
 “contextual apps,”
 “converting a full talk/presentation into a Powerpoint Presentation,”
 “cookie policy,”
 “corrupt files in the registry,”
 “course management system,”
 “create a culture of encounter,”
 “creating the SCC path by walking,”

“creative marketing,”
“critical media literacy tools,”
“crowdfunding,”
“crowdfunding page,”
“crowdfunding push,”
“crowdsourced voice library,”
“crowdsourcing,”
“crowdsourcing website,”
“cross-learning platform,”
“cross platform group chat,”
“cyber brothers and sisters,”
“cyber connectivity,”
“cyber crime,”
“cyber discipleship,”
“cyber encounters,”
“cyber-evangelist,”
“cyber fold,”
“cyber group,”
“cyber group ministry,”
“cyber liturgy,”
“cyber media,”
“cyber office,”
“cybersecurity,”
“cybersex,”
“cybersmart background,”
“cyberspace world,”
“cyberstalking,”
“cybertheology,”
“cybertraditionalism,”
“cyberwarfare,”
“cyborg Christian,”
“daily gospel online,”
“data cleanse,”
“data organization training,”
“data protections laws,”
“data protection standards,”
“data recovery software,”
“data signal on my phone,”
“data visualization” (“data viz”),
“deactivate the old version,”
“deadlock,”
“dedicated support team,”
“deepfake,”
“default social platform,”
“democratization of smartphones,”
“democratized information,”
“demonstration video,”
“designer communities (book clubs, etc.)”
“desktop connectivity,”
“desktop and mobile versions of websites,”
“Developer vis-vis Maintenance Person

“device-to-device communications,”
“dial in via Global Meet,”
“digi forum,”
“digitalism activism,”
“digital access,”
“Digital Africa,”
“digital African-themed platform,”
“digital age,”
“digital age publishing,”
“digital apocalypse,”
“digital archives,”
“digital archives system,”
“digital areopagus,”
“digital arts,”
“digital Babylon,”
“digital banking,”
“digital bibles,”
“digital book,”
“digital breadcrumbs,”
“digital campaigning,”
“digital-centric news operation,”
“digital channels,”
“digital chat room,”
“digital church,”
“digital church and E-culture in the New Media Age,”
“digital church ministry,”
“digital citizens,”
“digital city,”
“digital commerce,”
“digital commons,”
“digital communication(s),”
“digital community,”
“digital company,”
“digital conference,”
“digital connectedness,”
“digital connectivity,”
“digital contact,”
“digital content,”
“digital contexts,”
“digital continent,”
“digital, convergence model,”
“digital conversations,”
“digital culture,”
“digital culture is changing our world,”
“digital delivery companies,”
“digital democracy,”
“Digital Department,”
“digital detox zone,”
“digital disciple,”
“digital discussion group,”
“digital divide.”

“digital documents library,”
“digital door,”
“digital downloading,”
“digital ecosystem,”
“digital edition,”
“digital environment,”
“digital epidemic,”
“digital era,”
“digital evangelism,”
“digital evangelization,”
“digital-first editorial,”
“digital-first editorial strategy,”
“digital-first media landscape,”
“digital footprint,”
“digital formats,”
“digital forum,”
“digital games,”
“digital generation,”
“digital giving,”
“digital highway,”
“digital housecleaning,”
“digital identity,”
“digital immigrants,”
“digital information galaxy,”
“digital is the new default,”
“digital is the norm,”
“digital journalism,”
“digital kids,”
“digital learning,”
“digital learning center,”
“digital learning options,”
“digital learning platforms,”
“digital libraries community,”
“digital library,”
“digital library systems,”
“digital life,”
“digital life is our new normal,”
“digital literacy,”
“digital literacy program,”
“digital loop,”
“digital mantra: “update and restart, NOT download.”
“digital market,”
“digital marketing,”
“digital marketing is a science/profession,”
“digital marketing strategy,”
“digital means,”
“digital media,”
“digital media campaign,”
“digital media platform,”
“digital media (social networks, email) are 21st century town square,”
“digital media team,”

“digital media world,”
“digital membership,
“digital membership program,”
“digital migration,”
“digital ministry,”
“digital missionaries on the electronic continent,”
“digital/mobile first business model,”
“digital movies,”
“digital multi-media age,”
“digital, multimedia and transmedia from the beginning,”
“digital nation,”
“digital native,”
“digital network,”
“digital news,”
“digital news hub,”
“digital newspaper,”
“digital noise,”
“digital notebook,”
“digital-only future,”
“Digital Outreach Agent,”
“digital overload,”
“digital partnership,”
“digital pilgrims,”
“digital platform(s),”
“digital pre-order,”
“digital presence,”
“digital and print delivery,”
“digital privacy,”
“digital propaganda,”
“digital quotient test (DQ Test),”
“digital reader,”
“digital reformation,”
“digital relationships,”
“digital religion,”
“digital repository,”
“digital revenue,”
“digital revolution,”
“digital sabbath,”
“digital services,”
“digital set-up box,”
“digital seminary,”
“digital set-up box,”
“digital social media”
“digital social networking”
“digital solution agenda,”
“digital space,”
“digital space to share, ”
“digital spirituality,”
“digital storytelling,”
“digital strategy,”
“digital streets,”

“digital streaming service,”
 “digital subscription,”
 “digital subscription business,”
 “digital summit,”
 “digital support group,”
 “digital technology,”
 “digital technologies,”
 “digital theology,”
 “digital three-dimensional environments,”
 “digital transformation,”
 “digital transformation of books,”
 “digital transformation strategy,”
 “digital video recorders,”
 “digital video stream,”
 “digital wireless system,”
 “digital world,”
 “digital world is a democratic environment,”
 “digital world is a network not of wires, but of people,”
 “digital world is a public square,”
 “digitally emergent new generation,”
 “digitally -focused enterprise,”
 “digitally propelled world in contemporary evangelization,”
 “digitalized documents,”
 “digitized documents,”
 “digitalized men and women moving hand in hand with the digital generation,”
 “digitalizing family records,”
 “direct wire transfer method,”
 “discover the web once click at a time,”
 “discretionary sales,”
 “distance e-learning mode of study,”
 “distance learning,”
 “distant learning,”
 “Distributed Computing Technology,”
 “DocuSign” (electronic signatures)
 “do digital,”
 “domain parking account,”
 “dot.com Catholic,”
 “dot.com Christian,”
 “dot.com priest,”
 “dot-com-era start up,”
 “drive-by download,”
 “drivers of digital subscription growth,”
 “download Sunday,”
 “dynamic calendar,”
 “dynamic pricing,”
 “E-Age,”
 “earbuds,”
 “early web,”
 “eblast,”
 “ebook (electronic book),”
 “ebook platforms,”

“ebook revolution,”
“ecclesial information service,”
“e-Church,”
“e-commerce jungle”
“e-commuting,”
“eConference (E-Conference or web conference),”
“e-Courses,”
“eco-ritual,”
“eco-skies,”
“e-Culture,”
“e-Data,”
“education platform,”
“e-Editions,”
“effective business marketing tool,”
“e-Friends,”
“e-format,”
“ejournal,”
“elastic database pools,”
“e-learning,”
“e-Meeting,”
“e-meet you,”
“eNotice,”
“electronic address,”
“electronic ballot tracking system,”
“electronic book,”
“electronic classroom,”
“electronic database,”
“electronic data interchange (EDI),”
“Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT),”
“electronic hearth,”
“electronic introduction,”
“electronic learning,”
“electronic magic,”
“electronic publishing,”
“electronic resources,”
“electronic subscription,”
“email-based groups,”
“email editor,”
“email marketing,”
“email networker,”
“email thread,”
“embedded mobile compatibility,”
“embedded content,”
“embedded viewing,”
“emerging virtual community,”
“emoticon,”
“empowerment of social media,”
“encrypted messaging services,”
“Energy (alternative, carbon-free, clean, renewable),”
“end-to-end encryption,”
“engaging with people in the digital realm,”

“enhance internet and wi-fi connectivity,”
 “enhanced driver license,”
 “Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) System,”
 “ERP System,”
 “Ethesis,”
 “EV (Electronic Vehicle)”
 “evangelization of the digital continent,”
 “evangelize digitally,”
 “evangelizing in cyberspace,”
 “evangelizing online,”
 “evangomercials,”
 “Every solution starts with sharing a problem. Technology thrives in the open,”
 “evidenced-based content,”
 “evolution of our society from the industrial age to the information age,”
 “experiencing God in the internet age,”
 “experiential centers/stores,”
 “external personal assistant service,”
 “extreme blogging,”
 “extreme diaspora situation,”
 “extreme impact protection,”
 “e-Waste,”
 “5G networks remake the internet,”
 “Facebook apostolate,”
 “Facebook as a social media tool.”
 “Facebook fanpage,”
 “Facebook Live,”
 “Facebook ministry,”
 “Facebook page looks even better on mobile,”
 “facebooking,”
 “face to face time,”
 “facilitation skills,”
 “FB community,”
 “faith-based website design company,”
 “family facetimeing,”
 “fear of missing out (FoMO),”
 “feature phone,”
 “fiber cut,”
 “fiber home,”
 “filter applied,”
 “firmware,”
 “first fully digital generation,”
 “first message in the thread,”
 “403 Forbidden Error,”
 “5G -- fifth-generation cellular networks
 “5G is a New Frontier for Mobile Carriers and Tech Companies,”
 “flagship site,”
 “flash features,”
 “flashmob,”
 “flip classroom,”
 “flip phone,”
 “flush the system,”

“flocknotes,”
“flourishing media ministry,”
“focused marketing,”
“focused networking,”
“forced ads on smartphones,”
“forensic author identification software,”
“forming church ministers in a digital age,”
“4G data bundle,”
“4G LTE (Fourth Generation Long Term Evolution) standard,”
“free conference call,”
“free creation tools,”
“Free ‘domain parking’ account,”
“free media platform,”
“free messaging application for smartphones,”
“freestanding presentation of online video,”
“front cam,”
“full digital access,”
“full digital edition,”
“full-text content,”
“fullvid,”
“future is now,”
“gadget tutoring,”
“gaining traction,”
“gaming platforms,”
“gaming video,”
“gated [restricted] content,”
“gchat.”
“Gen z audience,”
“Generation Z,”
“geofencing,”
“giant digital space,”
“give the internet a soul,”
“glass screen protection/protector,”
“Global Church Digital Collection,”
“global digital brand,”
“global digital campaign,”
“global digital subscription membership service,”
“global gaming,”
“global livestream,”
“Global Positioning Service (GPS) Rollover,”
“Global Protect software,”
“global smartphone market,”
“global text messaging system,”
“global village,”
“go digital or die,”
“go digital or perish,”
“going totally digital,”
“going viral,”
“good texters,”
“Google classroom,”
“Google organic search,”

“Google Play Store,”
 “Google trendspotters,”
 “Google voice search,”
 “Google webmaster tools,”
 “Gospel in the digital age,”
 “Gospel of the New Media,”
 “group chat,”
 “group push notifications,”
 “group video calling,”
 “grey literature,”
 “grow/growing youth/young leadership,”
 “grow your audience,”
 “growing the church through new media,”
 “growth hacking,”
 “GSM (global system for mobile)”
 “hacker ethic,”
 “handheld cameras,”
 “handheld devices,”
 “handheld electronic devices,”
 “handmade web design,”
 “handset,”
 “hard reset,”
 “hard shut down/reboot,”
 “hashtag,”
 “hashtag activism,”
 “hashtag #ccmaconvention,”
 “#hashtag ‘Kenyan on Twitter’ (#KOT),”
 “heavy duty plastic sleeve,”
 “highly globalized, highly digitalized 21st century world,”
 “high speed fiber-optic network,”
 “high-speed 4G mobile internet connectivity puts Africa on fast track,”
 “holographs” (heads-up displays),
 “hosted podcasts,”
 “hot desks,”
 “hot mail,”
 “how to be holy online,”
 “https:// (the “s” is for additional security),”
 “hub networking,”
 “hub technology,”
 “‘hybrid model’ of ministry,”
 “hyper commerciality of the new media,”
 “hyperlink,”
 “hypertext,”
 “I am also a call away,”
 “iMessage,”
 “impact of the new information and communication technologies on family life,”
 “inbox me,”
 “ICT compliant,”
 “ICT & evangelization,”
 “ICT for evangelization/spreading the Good News to others.”
 “ICT impact,”

“ICT infrastructure,”
 “ICT is not a game changer, it is a life changer,”
 “ICT is the new DNA,”
 “ICT is now part and parcel of everyday lives,”
 “ICT is the tail wagging the dog,”
 “ICT literacy,”
 “ICT is now part and parcel of everyday lives,”
 “ICT personnel,”
 “ICTs skills,”
 “ICT Training Forum,”
 “iCloud Storage,”
 “iGen’ers,”
 “image and video sharing social media,”
 “IMO (in my opinion),”
 “increasingly video-friendly social media platforms,”
 “independent Catholic news site,”
 “individual data safe (typically a sliver of server space),”
 “infodemic,”
 “infographics,”
 “infographic world,”
 “informatics specialists,”
 “Information Communication Technology (ICT),”
 “Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) as a tool to evangelization,”
 “information drive,”
 “information literacy,”
 “information superhighway,”
 “information systems,”
 “information technology (IT),⁹⁰⁵
 “information technology infrastructural library (ITIL),
 “information website,”
 “informational democratization,”
 “infovid,”
 “innovative multimedia,”
 “instant communication system,”
 “instant messaging,”
 “instant messaging on social media,”
 “instant mobile chatting services,”
 “institutional repository services,”
 “Integrated Management Information System (IMIS).”
 “intelligent assistant,”
 “intelligent personal assistant,”
 “interactive board,”
 “interactive communications,”
 “interactive mobile platform,”
 “interactive module,”
 “interactive virtual venues,”

⁹⁰⁵ We do surveys of young people in cities such as Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Five years ago the answer to the question “What is the dominant youth culture in cities in East Africa?” was “American TV.” Today the answer is “IT.”

“interactive virtual venues where youth congregate,”
 “interactive wall,”
 “interactive website,”
 “interface between the browser and the printer,”
 “internal reboot,”
 “international cellular backhaul,”
 “international computer driving license,”
 “international, peer-reviewed, open access online journal,”
 “internet activism,”
 “internet addiction,”
 “internet address,”
 “internet as a new way of being church,”
 “internet is a gift from God,”
 “internet apostolate,”
 “internet compliant,”
 “internet connectivity,”
 “internet connectivity as a daily and conscious need,”
 “internet directory,”
 “internet directories web page,”
 “internet evangelization,”
 “internet feed,”
 “internet -- huge network of computers all connected together,”
 “internet is a lawless space,”
 “internet is the new city for youth,”
 “internet is the new home of youth,”
 “internet now is invisible and ubiquitous,”
 “internet livestream,”
 “internet meme,”
 “internet ministry,”
 “internet networking,”
 “internet or digital future,”
 “internet.org app,”
 “internet outreach,”
 “internet platforms,”
 “internet progressive notion of ecclesial gathering,”
 “internet publishing strategies,”
 “internet revolution,”
 “internet service,”
 “internet/social media are going to save us,”
 “internet, text messages and social networks are a gift from God,”
 “internet theology,”
 “internet towns of Facebook, Skype, WhatsApp, etc.,”
 “internet towns that are not geographical but situational,”
 “internet traffic jam,”
 “internet TV,”
 “internet user workshop,”
 “internet video,”
 “internet world.”
 “iPhone App development,”
 “iPhone and laptop generation,”
 “iPod Shuffle,”

“IP blacklisting,”
 “IP whitelisting,”
 “iTalk,”
 “IT era,”
 “IT mantra: ‘If you don’t use it, you lose it,’”
 “IT pathways,”
 “Joomla Migration,”
 “Journalism of Assertion,”
 “keyboard warriors,”
 “keyword optimization,”
 “Kindle Cloud Reader,”
 “Kindle content creation tools,”
 “Kindle Direct Publisher (KDP),”
 “landing page,”
 “leadership podcast,”
 “learning management platform (LMP),”
 “learning management system (LMS),”
 “learning platform,”
 “learning pods, pandemic pods, microschoools (teachers for small-group instruction)”
 “let’s Facetime,”
 “library as an information providing department in support of learning, teaching and research,”
 “life in the digital space,”
 “liquid glass screen protection/protector,”
 “link building,”
 “live.church,”
 “live online streaming,”
 “livestream” or “live stream,”
 “livestream now,”
 “livestreamed”
 “livestream mass,”
 “livestreaming,”
 “livestreaming apps,”
 “livestreaming Sunday,”
 “live streaming technology,”
 “livestreaming video/live streaming television feed,”
 “livestream online,”
 “live link,”
 “live stream watch online,”
 “live video,”
 “live video chat,”
 “live video streaming,”
 “living in a bubble,”
 “loading credit,”
 “local resource mobilization,”
 “lockdown,”
 “log-in remotely,”
 “long distance learning,”
 “long journey in the ICT world,”
 “long-tail keywords,”
 “long-term archiving,”

“low-cost, high-speed internet,”
“low-cost video messaging,”
“journalism in the age of smart phones,”
“junk computing,”
“magic of audiobooks,”
“mail server settings,”
“mainstream media,”
“marketing databases,”
“marketing program,”
“massive open online courses” (MOOCs),
“massive scale distance learning course,”
“mass mobile telephony,”
“media freedom activists,”
“media platforms,”
“media sensitization,”
“media unit,”
“media universe,”
“mediated online communities,”
“meme accounts on Instagram,”
“Memorial Service on Skype,”
“message exchange system,”
“message platform,”
“message this page,”
“messaging application,”
“messaging apps as default portals,”
“messaging platform,”
“messaging services,”
“metadata,”
“metadata adjustment,”
“metadata tag,”
“Meta tag updates,”
“metaverse (virtual universe),”
“microcell device,”
“micro or palm-sized desktop,”
“microrun (under 50 copies, as few as 10 copies),”
“Microsoft Account Problem,”
“Microsoft Word is hanging,”
“Microsoft Outlook web app,”
“mic test,”
“micro site,”
“migrating to a new interface,”
“millennials tethered to their smartphones and tablets,”
“mission critical systems,”
“mission in the digital environment,”
“missiographics,”
“mixed reality device,”
“mobi formats,”
“mobile algorithm change,”
“mobile app development,”
“mobile apps,”
“mobile boarding pass,”

“mobile broadband access,”
“mobile chat app,”
“mobile compatibility,”
“mobile compliant,”
“mobile connectivity,”
“mobile coverage,”
“mobile data roaming,”
“mobile device,”
“mobile devices compatible,”
“mobile digital revolution,”
“mobile digital technology platform,”
“mobile eco-system,”
“mobile-first world,”
“mobile friendly,”
“mobile friendly sites,”
“mobile friendly website,”
“mobile-inspired Windows 11,”
“mobile messaging,”
“mobile money,”
“mobile network coverage,”
“mobile network provider,”
“mobile office,”
“Mobile Passport Control,”
“mobile phone app,”
“mobile phone networks,”
“mobile platform provider,”
“mobile players,”
“mobile porting process,”
“mobile readiness check,”
“mobile reading platform,”
“mobile-responsive website solution,”
“mobile revolution” (spread of mobile devices)
“mobile search provider,”
“mobile services,”
“mobile sharing,”
“mobile technology,”
“mobile telephony,”
“mobile ticketing,”
“mobile wallet,”
“mobile web,”
“mobile website design,”
“modern digital information world,”
“modern digital media,”
“modern Twenty First Century digital content company,”
“monetization tools,”
“monetize a website (make money from your website),”
“monetizing students is tough,”
“more digital-friendly Vatican,”
“more globally connected than ever before,”
“more user-friendly interface,”
“most active platform for communication and networking,”

“moving to the digital world,”
 “mp4 or avi file of a video,”
 “multi-colored layers,”
 “Multi Factor Authentication (MFA),”
 “multimedia content,”
 “Multimedia Content Manager,”
 “multimedia marketing,”
 “multimedia platform ministry,”
 “multimedia platforms,”
 “multimedia and social media platforms,”
 “multi-modal” format,”
 “multi-platform,”
 “multi-platform media, including digital, social, print and events,”
 “multi-platform media ministry,”
 “Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS),”
 “multiple platforms,”
 “‘multiplication system’ through apps and social media,”
 “my email address keeps going south,”
 “national culture of the news media,”
 “Netflix streaming,”
 “Net TV,”
 “network bubble.”
 “network connectivity,”
 “network device,”
 “network is down,”
 “network security company,”
 “networked social journalism,”
 “networking a book,”
 “netizens (citizens of the net),”
 “networked world,”
 “network effect,”
 “networks of social relationships,”
 “new areopagus of our contemporary age,”
 “new data ecosystem,”
 “new digital content,”
 “new digital environment,”
 “new digital and social media means of communication,”
 “new digital wireless system,”
 “‘new disrupter,’ Amazon’s same-day delivery model,”
 “new ecosystem of independent Catholic media and social media,”
 “newest buzzword: IoT (internet of things),”
 “New Evangelization in the Digital Age,”
 “new horizons in digital marketing and social networking,”
 “new media landscape,”
 “new media start-up,”
 “new media technology,”
 “new media technology as an effective tool for evangelization,”
 “newness of the digital environment,”
 “New Normal,”
 “new online practice/praxis,”
 “new place for evangelization,”

“new platform for downloading Ebooks,”
“news aggregator”
“news feed algorithm,”
“news media websites,”
“new spaces for evangelization,”
“next gen,”
“next gen network,”
“next gen young people,”
“next generation small groups,”
“next is now,”
“niche publishing house,”
“nones are alright,”
“Oculus Rift, the immersive virtual-reality headsets,”
“off-campus e-resources access,”
“one all-purpose device,”
“one-stop IT solutions provider,”
“One Time Password (OTP),”
“ongoing networking,”
“online account,”
“online addiction,”
“online advertising,”
“online article limit,”
“online banking services,”
“online bulletin board system,”
“online campus,”
“online chat room party,”
“online Cloud backup,”
“online communications,”
“online community,”
“online congregation,”
“online consumption,”
“online crime,”
“online distribution,”
“online ecclesial gathering,”
“online education,”
“online electronic database,”
“online forums,”
“online friendships,”
“online fundraising,”
“Online House Churches,”
“online influencer,”
“online influencer world,”
“online international contemporary theological learning platform,”
“online journalism,”
“online journal via the internet,”
“online learning,”
“online learning community,”
“online live video,”
“online marketing,”
“online marketing presence,”
“online marketing services,”

“online marketing strategies,”
“online media,”
“online meetings,”
“online messaging app,”
“online mode,”
“online multimedia content,”
“online networking,”
“online networks,”
“online news correspondents,”
“online participation,”
“online payment platform service provider,”
“online payment processing provider,”
“online platforms,”
“online portal,”
“online powerpoint presentations,”
“online presence,”
“online publications,”
“online publicity,”
“online publishing,”
“online publishing companies/houses,”
“online reporting,”
“online service on internet platforms,”
“online services,”
“Online SCC,”
“online streaming sites,”
“online tools and resources,”
“online technology,”
“online threaded discussion.”
“online training,”
“online vendor,”
“online voices,”
“Online Wisdom Community,”
“online writing,”
“online Zoom webinar,”
“on-screen Zoom boxes,”
“on-site workshops,”
“open access journal,”
“open access publishing,”
“open platform,”
“open research practices,”
“open source commercial version,”
“open source package,”
“open source repository application/software package,”
“open source software,”
“open-source software project,”
“open source theology,”
“optimization,”
“organic IT services,”
“organic search engine traffic,”
“organic search results,”
“organic traffic,”

“organizes desktop papers,”
 “the original surfers,”
 “our incredible shrinking attention span,”
 “our lives are becoming technology/digitally centered,”
 “outboard or auxiliary keyboard,”
 “Outlook Web App,”
 “outsourced vendor,”
 “over quota,”
 “P2P (person to person talks),”
 “Page Flip,”
 “PageRank algorithm,”
 “Pauline eReader App,”
 “parish app as a faith resource,”
 “Patch Tuesday,”
 “‘perfect bind’ binding,”
 “password app,”
 “password embedded in link,”
 “password services,”
 “Pastoral Sub-domain on Word Press,”
 “paywall,”
 “pdf format/version/file,”
 “periscoping,”
 “personal data sovereignty,”
 “Personal Device Entertainment System,”
 “Personal Identifiable Information (PII),”
 “phablet-only life,”
 “phishing website,”
 “photo app,”
 “photo-driven social network,”
 “photo-sharing social network,”
 “photog spacing,”
 “Picture-in-Picture feature,”
 “place holder for a valid handle prefix.”
 “please google...”
 “plug-ins.”
 “plug-in running online calendar system,”
 “Pods (personal online data stores),
 “POD service providers,”
 “popular online instant messaging tool,”
 “post app period,”
 “posting on walls,”
 “powerbank,”
 “powered by WordPress,”
 “preaching the Gospel to people on their iPhones and computers,”
 “predictive, actionable dashboard,”
 “Premier Service Provider (PSP),”
 “premium domain names,”
 “presence of the Catholic Church in the new technologies”
 “printer spread format,”
 “print and online platforms,”

“Print on Demand (POD),”⁹⁰⁶
 “Print on Demand book publishing,”
 “Print on Demand protocols,”
 “Print on Demand with digital technology,”
 “print to order,”
 “priority of File Management,”
 “programming the settings for different apps and programs,”
 “proprietary deep web technology,”
 “proprietary videotelephony product,”
 “public service media,”
 “public service media ethics,”
 “Publish4All Print Centre,”
 “publishing platform,” (same as CMS)
 “pure clickbait,”
 “push the reset button,”
 “QR Code,”
 “quantum bits or qubits,”
 “quantum computing,”
 “quick-hit convenience of digital media,

⁹⁰⁶ **Print-on-demand (POD)** is a [printing](#) technology and business process in which book copies (or other documents) are not printed until the company receives an order, allowing prints of singular or small quantities. While other industries established the [build to order](#) business model, "print-on-demand" could only develop after the beginning of [digital printing](#), because it was not economical to print single copies using traditional printing technology such as [letterpress](#) and [offset printing](#).

Many traditional [small presses](#) have replaced their traditional printing equipment with POD equipment or contract their printing to POD service providers. Many [academic publishers](#), including [university presses](#), use POD services to maintain large [backlists](#) (lists of older publications); some use POD for all of their publications. Larger publishers may use POD in special circumstances, such as reprinting older, out of print titles or for test marketing.



A print-on-demand book printer at the [Internet Archive](#) headquarters in [San Francisco, California](#). Two large printers print the pages (left) and the cover (right) and feed them into the rest of the machine for collating and binding. Depending on the number of pages, printing may take 5 to 20 minutes.

Wikipedia Website, retrieved on 11 December, 20127,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Print_on_demand

“radio button,” (one choice)
 “rapid response media operation,”
 “reach more readers,”
 “‘Read Aloud’ Version,”
 “reader spread format,”
 “reading on multifunction devices,”
 “really going digital,”
 “real-time translator,”
 “red flag,”
 “refresh or clear the cache,”
 “relationships in the internet age,”
 “remote control journalism,”
 “remote control and online meeting,”
 “remote control writing,”
 “remote learning,”
 “remote teaching,”
 “remote teaching platform,”
 “reoccurring” (Zoom code)
 “research capacity,”
 “reset system,”
 “respondus online platform,”
 “responsive template,”
 “‘restore point’ to recover Windows,”
 “rich, multimedia digital content that can be streamlined for particular broadcast media,”
 “robot journalism,”
 “salary is grant funded,”
 “Samsung Galaxy S® 6, an AT&T 4G LTE smartphone,”
 “satellite coverage,”
 “satellite internet,”
 “satellite reunion,”
 “saving in another window,”
 “scam site,”
 “scan app,”
 “SCCs networking platform or forum,”
 “SCCs-related Apps,”
 “screen culture,”
 “screenshot (from Zoom Call or film),”
 “screen sharing,”
 “seamless installation of software,”
 “search engine marketing” (SEM),
 “search engine optimization” (SEO),
 “search engine performance,”
 “search engine rankings matter,”
 “second machine age,”
 “second-screen experience,”
 “secure socket layer (SSL),”
 “seismic generational gap,”
 “selfies -- emergent form of folk art for millennials.”
 “self-publishing company,”
 “Sender Policy Framework (SPF),”

“server farms,”
“server migration,”
“service delivery platforms,”
“sex text messages,”
“sexting,”
“share on your own timeline,”
“sharing apps,”
“shift to a whole new way of virtual thinking,”
“shelter-in-place,”
“Shopify migration,”
“short form streaming platform,”
“Short Messaging Service (SMS),”
“side-feed,”
“signature on tablet rather than scanning paper copy,”
“simpler, more intuitive website,”
“simultaneous captioning technology,”
“site visitors,”
“Skype Mass,”
“skyping,”
“small group faith-sharing online resource,”
“small group software management platform,”
“smart cars,”
“smart homes,”
“smart city,”
“smartphone app,”
“smartphone capability of mobile website,”
“smartphone conversation,”
“smartphone industry,”
“smartphone is an extension of young people’s communications,”
“smartphone is a third eye or extra eye for young people,”
“smartphone – early 21st century’s defining technology,”
“smartphone malware,”
“smartphone messages,”
“smartphone messaging service,”
“smartphone network,”
“smartphone parish app,”
“smartphone Photography,”
“smartphone platform,”
“smartphone prayer network,”
“smartphone’s embedded global positioning system (GPS),”
“smartphone, smart photography,”
“smartphone technology,”
“smartphone writer and hardware analyst with technical chops,”
“smart photography,”
“smart switch app,”
“smart video conferencing camera,”
“smart wall,”
“social engineering,”
“social engineering attacks,”
“social impact of the digital media,”
“social presence,”

“social marketing,”
 “social media – a new mission language.”
 “social media as an anti-corrupton tool,”
 “social media as an important tool for evangelization work,”
 “social media as a new platform,”
 “social media as a paradigm shift,”
 “social media channels,”
 “social media communities,”
 “social media conversations,”
 “social media ecosystem,”
 “social media environment,”
 “social media giant,”
 “social media interactions,”
 “social media is the new CV,”
 “social media marketing,”
 “social media networking,”
 “social media networks,”
 “Social Media Optimization,”
 “social media optimization services,”
 “social media outreach,”
 “social media platform(s),”
 “social media platforms as vibrant tools for promoting the works of evangelization,”
 “social media presence,”
 “Social Media SCC,”
 “social media – single greatest form of connectivity between Generation X and Millennials,”
 “social media strategist,”
 “social media strategy,”
 “social media website,”
 “social media wired,”
 “social networking forums/platforms are “the new pulpits of our time,”
 “social networking media,”
 “social networking sites (SNSs),”
 “social network's algorithm,”
 “social networks,”
 “social networks are the great digital continent,”
 “social networks are helping to rewire human society,”
 “social platforms,”
 “social plugin,”
 “socially networked world,”
 “software ecosystem,”
 “solar microgrid,”
 “spam arrest,”
 “Spam Arrest Service,”
 “specialized search engine providers,”
 “speech to text software (such as Dragon Dictate)
 “speed depends on the number of users.”
 “spirituality of technology – the internet as life-giving,”
 “spoofed website,”
 “SSL (Secure Sockets Layer),”
 “stall speed,”

“stand alone captions,”
 “stay connected, seamlessly,”
 “steep IT learning curve,”
 “sticky notes on causal diagram,”
 “storefront to the world,”
 “streamable,”
 “stream in,”
 “streaming,”
 “streaming license,”
 “streaming live on YouTube,”
 “streaming outlets,”
 “streaming services,”
 “streaming TV,”
 “streaming video content,”
 “streaming video service,”
 “subdomain platform,”
 “subscribe at your app store,”
 “subscription-first journalism,”
 “subscription video on demand platform,”
 “surfing the net,”
 “switch between real and virtual worlds,”
 “switching from digital reading to digital listening,”
 “sync and transfer files via Micro USB data cable,”
 “synchronized digital marketing,”
 “system architecture,”
 “tablet devices,”
 “tech lifestyle,”
 “tech literacy,”
 “Technology, Entertainment and Design (TED),”
 “technology and spirituality are compatible,”
 “technology-based virtual learning,”
 “technology-driven world order,”
 “technology is not for work but for life,”
 “technological interconnectedness,”
 “techo-savvy church,”
 “tech-savvy,”
 “tech-savvy Generation Z,”
 “tech values,”
 “teleconference calls as an easy means of communications,”
 “teleconferencing app,”
 “telecommunication platforms,”
 “telecommuting,”
 “tele-presence device,”
 “tele-presence conference,”
 “television application space,”
 “tent,”
 “tethering,”
 “text message marketing,”
 “text messaging services,”
 “text neck syndrome,”
 “text to mobile phone,”

“textalyzer,”
“textspeak,”
“text stop,”
“text-to-speech enabled,”
“theo-bloggers,”
“Think Before You Click,”
“thumb drive,”
“Thunderbolt 3/USB-3 port,”
“timelapse,”
“title cards/cue cards,”
“tokenization,”
“toolbar customization,”
“tools for hybrid work,”
“track changes,”
“traditional media outlets,”
“transferring a smartphone photo to Facebook,”
“trending worldwide,”
“true digital platforms,”
“turbo group,”
“turning a hashtag into movements,”
“21st-century media ministry,”
“21st-century multiplatform media ministry,”
“twerking,”
“tweet hard,”
“tweetstorm,”
“Tittersphere,”
“Twitter Handle,” (comment after the article)
“Twitter Theology,”
“ubiquitous ambient computing,”
“unfettered streaming,”
“unfiltered messages,”
“Uniform Resource Locator (URL),”
“unimaginable opportunity for evangelization,”
“universal mobile money transfers,”
“universal remote learning,”
“unlimited digital subscription/unlimited digital access,”
“unplugged but connected,”
“unsupported device,”
“updated spreadsheet,”
“updating operating systems is not clean,”
“URL matching,”
“USB stick/flash drive,”
“use of ICT in evangelization,”
“user friendly IT instructions,”
“user friendly on mobile devices,”
“user friendly websites,”
“use your multipliers in communications and networking,”
“using the Cloud to stay relevant,”
“using ICT for evangelizing,”
“vacation suspension,”
“video bites,”

“video board,”
“video call messenger,”
“video call on smartphone,”
“video calling app,”
“video chat,”
“video chat service,”
“video chatting,”
“video clips,”
“video communication service,”
“video conference,”
“video conference app,”
“video conference call application,”
“video conferencing,”
“video conferencing app,”
“video conferencing application,”
“video conferencing system,”
“video editing software,”
“video embedded in Ebook text,”
“video game store,”
“video journalist,”
“video-link form,”
“video meetings,”
“video mixer,”
“video metrics.”
“video multitasking,”
“video sharing website,”
“video storytelling,”
“video teleconferencing platforms,”
“video and written platforms”
“view as a web page,”
“view this email in a web page,”
“view this email in your browser,”
“viral link structure,”
“viral mechanism,”
“viral video games,”
“virgin message form,”
“virtual agent,”
“virtual assistant,”
“virtual assistant software,”
“virtual assistant AI technology,”
“virtual audience,”
“virtual background on Zoom, etc.”
“virtual civic space,”
“virtual chapel,”
“virtual classroom,”
“virtual communities,”
“virtual conference discount,”
“virtual conference software package,”
“Virtual Desktop Infrastructure (VDI),”
“virtual dioceses,”
“virtual education,”

“virtual education,”
 “virtual educational seminar/event,”
 “virtual environment,”
 “virtual events,”
 “virtual immersion experience,”
 “virtual in-person future,”
 “virtual instruction,”
 “Virtual International Conference,”
 “virtual language,”
 “virtual learning,”
 “virtual meetings,”
 “virtual mind rather than a geographical mind,”
 “virtual papal audience,”
 “virtual parishes,”
 “virtual private networks (VPNs),”
 “virtual reality,”
 “virtual reality check,”
 “virtual reality church,”
 “virtual reality device,”
 “virtual reality platform,”
 “virtual reality systems,”
 “virtual reality (VR) in the classroom,”
 “virtual reflection and prayer,”
 “virtual reunion,”
 “virtual structures,”
 “virtual table,”
 “virtual ticket,”
 “virtual travel assistant services,”
 “virtualization of Catholicism – the creation of religious identities in cyberspace,”
 “visual content strategy,”
 “visual platforms,”
 “visual voicemail,”
 “vlogging,”
 “vmail,”
 “v-safe,”
 “voice-activated helpers,”
 “voice activated home device,”
 “voice-controlled digital assistants,”
 “voice mail transcribed into text,”
 “voice over internet system,”
 “voice technology,”
 “VoIP – phone services over the internet,”
 “VPN access.”
 “VPN (Virtual Private Network) connection,”
 “Wall = Social Media Message Board,”
 “watch party” (group viewing on the internet/social media)
 “We are living in an Apps world,”
 “web and mobile ready,”
 “web as sort of life environment especially for the young,”
 “webathon,”
 “web-based activism,”

“web-based Catholic apologetics,”
 “web-based fidelity watchdogs,”
 “web-based media,”
 “web-based news,”
 “web-based news management,”
 “webbing,”
 “web browsing,”
 “webcasting and satellite transmissions,”
 “webconferencing,”
 “web conferencing meeting,”
 “web connectivity,”
 “web design,”
 “web development,”
 “web-friendly,”
 “webinar,”
 “weblink,”
 “web-linked TV,”
 “web pornography,”
 “web portal,”
 “web presence,”
 “web programmer/developer,”
 “web service provider,”
 “website analytics,”
 “web analytics basics,”
 “website broker,”
 “website designing,”
 “website design service,”
 “website optimization services,”
 “website optimizer,”
 “website visibility and traffic,”
 “websites can act like apps,”
 “websites that are not user friendly,”
 “web-streamed mass,”
 “we’ve reached peak app,”
 “WhatsApp communication,”
 “WhatsApp *harambees*,”
 “whitelisted,”
 “Windows Network diagnostics,”
 “Windows 10 phone,”
 “wireless connection,”
 “WordClouds,”
 “WordPress plugin called ‘FG Joomla to WordPress,’”
 “work around,”
 “workflows,”
 “work station,”
 “working smart in ICT,”
 “World Emoji Day,”
 “World Wide Web -- collection of webpages on network of computers,”
 “writing on the wall,”
 “you are only as good as your last post,”
 “you may telephone us, use email, sms or whatsapp,”

“YouTube Channel,”
 “young adult outreach,”
 “young people are natives of the digital world,”
 “young people as digital natives,”
 “young people like text messaging,”
 “zero royalties sale price,”
 “zip drive,”
 “zooming,”
 “zoom access,”
 “zoom bomb,”
 “zoom bombing,”
 “zoom boom generation,”
 “Zoom Church,”
 “zoom fatigue,”
 “zoom generation,”
 “zoom invitation,”
 “zoom meeting,”
 “zoom participant windows,”
 “zoom room,”
 “zoom social platform,”
 “zoom storage,”
 “zoom way of life.”

Thus the internet and the social media/new media revolution are changing the way the world – and the Catholic Church – communicates. Many church people have responded to the challenges of the internet, websites and the social media. Others lag behind and don’t appreciate the great potential. Thus the internet is called the “new sleeping giant.”⁹⁰⁷

Kenyan seminarian John Siyumbu, the former Moderator of the SCCs Facebook Page, describes the internet/cyberspace as a two edged sword.⁹⁰⁸ Another metaphor is the two sides of a coin. Both are situated in the context of the mantra: *We have to evangelize ourselves first before we can evangelize others.* So one edge or one side is the receiving/the learning/the taking in. With regard to social media some commentators have pointed out that it is crucial for the Catholic Church to first of all be a listener. We shouldn’t talk from the top down, but first listen to people’s worries and questions. The other side is the giving/the teaching/the proclaiming/the going out/the being sent/the evangelizing. Both are necessary.

In this digital age, in this digital culture we can dramatically expand our knowledge and understanding on three levels. First, the internet and the social media/new media can help in the formation and training of SCC leaders/animators/facilitators/coordinators in Africa. Second, the internet and the social media/new media can help members of SCCs in Africa

⁹⁰⁷ A term used for the Catholic laity after the Second Vatican Council.

⁹⁰⁸ John Siyumbu, “Talk on Online Resources Available to Evangelizers,” at the Formation Meeting on “Evangelizing in Cyberspace,” Blessed John Paul II Parish Evangelizing Teams, Maryknoll Assembly Hall, Nairobi, Kenya, 17 January, 2013.

especially in the AMECEA Region to share their experience with the rest of the world.⁹⁰⁹ Through the internet and other forms of this new information technology and digital world, members of African SCCs can also feel part of the Global Church, the World Church. Third, the internet and the social media/new media can help people around the world learn about SCCs in Africa.⁹¹⁰

In summary, we are challenged to learn to use social media to connect, network, mobilize SCC members as well as inform, form and educate them. Think of the power that could be unleashed if the 180,000 SCCs in Eastern Africa could be networked through the social media.

Some concrete examples:

- a. Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website
www.smallchristiancommunities.org

We started the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website in 2004 as the sister website of the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website that started in 1998. The SCCs Global Collaborative Website Coordinating Team includes 13 women and men, different nationalities, different religious denominations, different ethnic groups and different ages. This global networking website for Small Christian Communities (SCCs) worldwide shares SCCs contacts information, events, materials, articles, reports and news for each of the six continents: Africa (16 countries), Asia (seven countries plus AsIPA), Europe (six countries), Latin America (four countries), North America (three countries) and Oceania (one country).

The AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team of 16 people includes 15 Africans from Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia and one expatriate missionary based in Nairobi, Kenya. We regularly consult SCCs Coordinators on the diocesan and parish levels.

The Africa Continent Section includes a lot of continent-wide material (51 entries as of 19 December, 2019) and specific national material from the Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya (53 entries as of 19 December, 2019), Malawi, Rwanda, Nigeria, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe so far. It contains many articles, reports, Case Studies,

⁹⁰⁹ A concrete example is on 15 August, 2013 I participated in an online Video Conference Call on Google Hangout including an accompanying audio conversation with the Marianist Lay Formation Initiative (MLFI) whose members are scattered through the United States. I facilitated a training session on "Learning from African SCCs' Community Building Experiences." The background reading was "Examples of Demonstrations, Role Plays, Questions and Exercises on the Meaning and Importance of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa" (pages 237-246 of [Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa](#)).

⁹¹⁰ See the numerous examples in Joseph Healey, "Promoting SCCs via the Internet" in Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton, editors. *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*. Orbis Books, 2005 and Paulines Publications Africa, 2006, pp. 177-187. Available as an Ebook.

stories, talks and other resource materials on SCCs in Africa that can be useful to SCC practitioners in the field, researchers and writers.

The online, up-to-date Word Press Content Management System (CMS) Counter statistics lists the number of hits (visits) that each article and event has received on the right hand side. In our ongoing evaluation these statistics are very valuable to assess the effectiveness and influence of different parts of the website. All hits (visits) are of 19 December, 2019.

The overall most popular article is the [“1961-2015 Timeline in the History and Development of Small Christian Communities \(SCCs\) in Africa Especially Eastern Africa”](#) that has 8670 (7279 plus 1391) hits (visits). This timeline has proven very useful to many people and is quoted in books, articles, reports and talks. [“Applying the Eight National Priority Concerns of SCCs in America to the Catholic Church Context in Africa”](#) (in two sections) has 8567 hits (visits).

This is followed by: [“The Role of Small Christian Communities \(SCCs\) in the Implementation of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Africa”](#) has 7641 hits (visits). [Historical Development of the Small Christian Communities/Basic Ecclesial Communities in Africa](#) has 6986 hits (visits). [Checklist of 16 Common Activities in Small Christian Communities \(SCCs\) in Africa Today](#) has 6819 hits (visits). [Small Christian Communities as a New Way of Evangelization in Africa](#) has 6021 hits (visits).

The most popular article right now is [Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa](#) that was first posted in May, 2012 and has 4165 hits (visits). The most popular Archive Event (now up to 76 events) is “Recently we analyzed the data...” and has 5012 hits (visits).

Other features on the website are: Academia Website: <https://princeton.academia.edu/JosephHealey>⁹¹¹ (47 papers⁹¹² and 10,780 total views as of 3 June, 2022) including:

⁹¹¹ The research questions or keywords entered into the Search Engines outside Academia, but linked to [academia.edu](https://princeton.academia.edu/JosephHealey) reveal the specific interests of inquiring people such as: “The role of the chairman of a Small Christian Community.” “Small Christian Communities in Africa.” “What is theological empowerment of Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Church?” “How to influence people to join in the meeting of Small Christian Community?” “Ethio publicly SCC video.” “Small Christian Community structure.” “Development and management of SCCs in parishes.” “AMECEA bishops Small Christian Communities.” “Domesticism in African theology.” “Nairobi Kenya Christian community.” “Joseph Healey Small Christian Communities.” “African Ecclesiology.” “Catholic men vocation in East Africa.” “Small Christian Communities by AMECEA.” Challenges facing Small Christian Communities today.” “Small Christian Communities in Catholic Church Botswana.” “Sharing Gospel in Small Christian Communities.” “History of St. Charles Lwanga Catholic Church Regiment Parish.” “St. Agata Catholic Church in Nairobi.” “Buleya banned from Baptist fellowship.” “Small Christian Community Chairperson's Speech.” “How KCCB has promoted theology in Africa.” “The family of God in the light of African Christian Theology.” “Training and research job opportunities in the nine AMECEA countries.” What is special about the firstborn or first fruit in biblical and African cultural contexts? “What does the Catholic Church teach on empowerment of Small Christian Communities?” “The AMECEA Study Conference on “Deeper Evangelization in the Third Millennium” took place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in July, 2002.” “Supreme being by Sukuma Bujora.” “Soul in myth narrated from the Sukuma.” “Small Christian Communities leading in Catholic Mass.” “CV of Fr. Titus Amigu.” “Factors to consider when writing magazines about Small Christian Community.” KCCB Lenten Campaign theme 2016!” “Malula lay ministry.” Bujora books research on Sukuma by Fr...” “PMC Catholic Diocese of Kakamega.” “Small Christian Community Africa...how many families.” “Joseph Healey, Basic Christian Communities.” “The richness and complexity of contemporary African ecclesiologies in Uganda.” “Vatican II and Small Christian Communities.” “Basic Christian Community as Means of Evangelisation.” “Joseph G. Healey, Maryknoll Missionary.” “African family in crisis AMECEA.” “Small Christian Communities Annual General Meeting.” “How to write more minutes for Lenten Campaign for Small Christian Community.” “Christian advice for discordant couples.” “Small Christian Communities NJ.” “Examples of local Christian community in Kenya.” “History of my local Christian community in Kenya.” Discuss RCEA Ushirika Church, Eldoret.” “Origin of Small Christian Communities.” Relationship between Small Christian Communities and Lay Movements and Associations in the Parish.” “Basic Christian Community in Latin America and Uganda.” “7 Lures in Small Christian Community.” “Research on marriage and pastoral ministry in Africa.” “How do BCCs or Small Christian Communities in Catholic Church celebrate Galilee feast on Easter Monday?” “The parable of the two brothers Tanzanian story.” “Small Christian Communities are a new way of being/becoming church in Africa today; give five concrete reasons.” “How to promote Youth Small Christian Communities.” “Role of the church in empowerment of Small Christian Communities economically in Catholic Churches.” “How can Small Christian Communities promote pastoral conversion.” “Vatican 2 Small Christian Communities.” “Relationship between Small Christian Communities and lay apostolic movements and associations.” “A biblical approach to marriage and family Africa pdf download.” “How to manage Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Church in Kenya.” “Eastern Deanery

AIDS program community health volunteers.” “Sukuma sayings and their meaning pdf.” “Sukuma oral narrative.” “pdf collaborative ministry in the context of inculturation.” “Activities of Basic Christian Communities.” “Researches of Sukuma language.” “pdf za methali za Wasukuma.” “Challenges of Small Christian Community.” “In Kenyan context importance in using prayer and faith reflection in a local community.” “Research done on traditions and customs among Sukuma people.” “Small Christian Communities pastoral concerns.” “Origin of Small Christian Communities in Catholic Church ppt.” “What is Small Christian Communities in Catholic Church in Africa ppt.” “Google books, African Ecclesiology.” “SCCs as a New Way of Being Local Church.” History of myth of Sukuma.” “The hero child in the Sukuma society.” “How can Small Christian Communities promote pastoral conversion.” “Latest video of Pope Francis’ speech on Small Christian Communities.” “African example of the church as Family of God.” “Challenges of Small Christian Communities in Catholic Diocese of Eldoret pdf.” “History of Small Christian Communities.” “Small Christian Communities in East Africa on Youtube.” “See Judge Act Reconciliation.” “Sukuma sayings.” “Bartholomew Bauleni born 1952 biography, “History of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Catholic Church.” “Definition of Small Christian Community.” “St. Matia Mulumba CTC.” “Importance of *Jumuiya* in the Catholic Church.” “Nyanja song gospel Oscar Phiri download sda.” “Basic Ecclesial Community 2015.” “Describe and analyze the origins and developments of Christian faith in Nyeri.” http://www.academia.edu/8022439/Small_Christian_Communities_as_Domestic_Church_in_the_Context_of_African_Ecclesiology. “Activities at Small Christian Community gatherings.” “History of Small Christian Communities.” Anthony Ntang Ndichia.” “Are nuns members of Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Church?” “Objectives of a Youth Small Christian Community.” “Some of the strategies of Small Christian Communities to serve the needy in Malawi.” “The need of salvation in Sukumaland.” “The need of salvation in Sukuma.” “Term paper of need of salvation to Sukuma Ethnic Group.” “The way we can help the Sukuma to get the salvation.” “Anniversary texts for a Small Christian Community.” “History of Small Christian Communities in AMECEA.” “Church self-help groups Constitutions in Kenya.” “Rev. Fr. Titus Amigu.” “The need of salvation in Sukumaland.” “The Sukumas’ origin in Africa.” “Location of Vincentian Prayer House, Lavington, Kenya using a matatu.” “Download video for installation of Archbishop Martin Kivuva Musonde of Mombasa.” “Terms of Basic Christian Community.” “Small Christian Community in Swahili.” “St. Peter’s Square Small Christian Communities.” “Theology of Small Christian Community.” “Marianist Nairobi Kangemi water.” “Sr. Josée Ngalula publications.” “Li Shing’weng’we na Masala Kulangwa.” St. Andrews CTC, Mumias.” “List of ordained priests in Kisii Diocese, Kenya.” “Duties of a chairperson of a Small Christian Community.” “Relationship between Small Christian Community and Family.” “Small Christian Community and family apostolate.” “Father Lance Nadeau, MM.” Plainfield chairlady name in Kenya.” “Why Small Christian Communities animate Mass on Sunday.” “Joseph G Healey, Maryknoll.” “Pd. Charles Nyamiti - CUEA, Kenya.” “Promoting Small Christian Community.” Youth topics in Small Christian Communities.” “Historical background of Small Christian Community in Tanzania.” “Mathematics concepts among the Sukuma.” “Research on Small Christian Communities.” “Karibuni kwetu Nanyuki Monastery.” “Titus Amigu.” “Who was the first parish priest at St. Joseph Catholic Church, Tudor, Mombasa, Kenya?” “Guidance of contacting Catholic Small Christian Community.” “Role of treasurer in a Small Christian Community.” “Pontifical Council for the pastoral care of migrants and itinerant people.” “Methali za Kisukuma (pdf).” “Leadership in Small Christian Communities.” “How the Sukuma people inherit the value of the human person.” “Challenges facing Small Christian Communities today in Kenya.” “Small Christian

Communities in Nairobi." "Vatican Council 2 about Small Christian Communities." "Research studies done in Kenya on Small Christian Communities." "Economic activities Small Christian Communities engage in Kitale Diocese." "What is the meaning of Sukuma word 'shikome'?" "Father Armogast Mdawida the New Bishop of Machakos." "Small Christian Communities in Catholic Nairobi." "Importance of Small Christian Communities." "How can the youth be involved in a small christian community, pdf." "Promoting family apostolate in Africa today: a Catholic perspective." "Christology in SCCs." "How important are Christian Small Communities in Malawi?" "Professor C. Majawa on Christian Small Communities." "How the Sukuma understand Jesus Christ." "Gospel mission CMS." "Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa,' by Joseph G. Healey, MM." "*Hadithi ya Shing'weng*"we." "Holy Week program Catholic Church Guadalupe Parish Adams/Nairobi." "SCCs in Vatican Two." "Download new life single Kafufuka." "Sukuma riddles and proverbs." "Sacramental initiation -- Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops." "Wasukuma magicians." "Small Christian Communities in diocese of Kisii." "Small Christian Communities in Archdiocese of Nyeri." "*Liwelelo* in Sukuma." "Small Christian Community --agents of transformation." "Download picture of Small Christian Community." "Lineamenta.com." "Gibson Phiri Junior Marianist." "Challenges of the Sukuma people." "In the Service of the Holy Spirit: The Ecclesial Vocation of the Canon Lawyer Ladislav Orsy." "Lance in relation to Cardinal Otunga sainthood." "Challenges of Small Christian Community." "What are the challenges of Small Christian Communities in the Church and what are the solutions to these challenges." "History of Young Christian Students (YCS) in Sudan." "Importance of Small Christian Communities in building the domestic church." "What is the procedure of conducting Small Christian Communities in the Catholic Church?" "Archdiocese of Lusaka Tentative Schedule of 2017 SCCs/Committees/Movements/Lay Organizations Elections." "Challenges of spiritual formation in Small Christian Communities." "What Happened at the African Synod. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Orobator AE (2000)." "Pope Francis on Small Christian Communities." "Link between *Africae Munus* and *Of Human Development*." "Small Christian Communities Establishment in Africa." "Basic Christian Communities Padila." "Basic Ecclesial Community." "African Christology." "Small Christian Communities Asia." "Small Christian Communities." "Sukuma." "Under the Vatican." "Vatican II: Theology of the Laity." "Building a Christian Marriage in Africa." "Functions of Small Christian Communities."

On a random day such as 11 January, 2016 inquiries came from Germany, India, Italy, Philippines, South Africa and USA. On 6 February, 2016 inquires came from India, Italy, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and South Africa. On 18 July, 2016 inquires came from Burundi, Canada, Kenya, Namibia and USA. On 27 August, 2016 inquires came from Australia, Kenya, Netherlands, Tanzania and USA. On 6 October, 2016 inquires came from China, India, Kenya, Netherlands, South Africa, Uganda, United Kingdom and USA. On 8 October, 2016 inquires came from India, Kenya, Netherlands, Nigeria, Tanzania, Turkey, United Kingdom, USA and Zimbabwe. On 21 November, 2016 the last week's inquiries came from (in alphabetical order): Cameroon, Canada, Ghana, India, Italy, Kenya, Poland, South Africa, Tanzania and United States. On 6 March, 2017 inquires came from Cameroon, India, Kenya, Malawi, Philippines and the United States. On 9 June, 2017 inquires came from Austria, Botswana, Europe, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and USA. On 12 March, 2018 inquires came from Ghana, Japan, Kenya, Tanzania and USA. On 13 March, 2018 inquires came from Austria, Finland, Kenya, South Africa, USA and Zambia. On 16 April, 2018 inquires came from Germany, Italy, Tanzania, United Kingdom and USA.

“Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa” leading with 1,918 all-time page views (hits or visits).

Small Christian Communities as Domestic Church in the Context of African Ecclesiology (1,661).

“Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Promote Family and Marriage Ministry in Eastern Africa” (815).

“Three Case Studies of African Christology among the Sukuma People in Tanzania” (804).

“New Learnings in Animating a Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church in Africa Today,” (763).

“Promoting Small Christian Communities in Africa through the Internet” (425)

“How Small Christian Communities Promote Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Eastern Africa” (421).

“How African Small Christian Communities Implement the Pastoral and Missionary Vision of Vatican II” (411).

“Promoting Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa in the Light of ‘The Joy of the Gospel’” (261).

“The Sukuma Sacrificial Goat and Christianity: A Basis for Inculturation in Africa” (191)

“Now it is Your Turn: East Africans Go in Mission” (180).

“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” (179)

“Promoting SCCs via the Internet” (143).

“Histories, Themes, Development and Challenges of Small Christian Communities in Africa” (135)

“Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as Agents of Change in the Fight against HIV and AIDS in Eastern Africa” (121).

Archives,⁹¹³ Book Reviews (18), Reports and Announcements, Calendar of Events, Ebooks (four), FAQ, Links to other SCCs Websites, Photo Gallery, SCC Polls, SCCs

As of 22 August, 2018 “All-time Views” (frequency of access by countries) have come from: Kenya (1,487), United States (838), India (304), Tanzania (326), Italy (304), Philippines (134), Nigeria (130), United Kingdom (120), Burundi (111), Rwanda (99), Zambia (87), South Africa (89), Uganda (82), Zimbabwe (56), Germany (56), Australia (44), Ghana (47), Canada (44), Malawi (41), Malaysia (19), Ethiopia (19), Holy See Vatican City State (17) and Sudan (3).

The top search engines are Google, Bing and Ask.com.

⁹¹² Academia recently reached a major milestone in the world’s research in 2017 towards enabling Open Access for academic research. It now have over 50 million members, who collectively have uploaded 18 million papers, read by 850 million people all over the world.

⁹¹³ Through Word Press all past “Calendar of Events” items are automatically stored in the “Archives Section.” As of 1 January, 2017 there are 62 items.

Resources (including Radio Programs), SCCs Stories Database, Search Engine, Videos [also on YouTube] and Presentations (13), Vision and What's New.

The first Ebook posted on the SCCs Website is the free Online Digital Version of the *Double Spearhead* Nos. 199-200 (2012) Book [Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of SCCs in Eastern Africa](#) published by AMECEA Gaba Publications -- CUEA Press in Eldoret, Kenya. This online version is updated every month with five pages of new research, statistics, quotations, reports, stories and examples. The latest version of 1 January, 2020 is 1,113 pages and has 16,198 hits (visits)⁹¹⁴ of 20 December, 2019.

The power and influence of the internet and our SCC Website are seen in this email message from a Tanzanian Missionary of Africa Father Wilbert Gobbo, MAfr who did research for a doctorate on the Social Trinity with a Case Study on Small Christian Communities in Tabora Archdiocese, Tanzania⁹¹⁵ at Heythrop College, University of London, England.⁹¹⁶

Thank you a million for this information! I do not consider your email and the information as a "coincidence" but rather as a "God-incidence!"⁹¹⁷

⁹¹⁴ Combined with the special 4135 hits (visits) and including 937 on Word Press directly to this Ebook via the Africa Continent Page of the SCCs Website, 1,920 page views on [Academia.edu](#), 343 reads on [ResearchGate](#), and 14 results on [Google Scholar](#) makes a total of 20,333 hits (visits) as of 20 December, 2019. This Ebook is also accessed directly through links on other websites including libraries, archives, universities, institutional repositories like DSpace, ERepositories, search engines like Google Search, special web search engines like Google Scholar, social media platforms like Facebook, academic websites, individual websites and citations. A complete analysis is found on the Website Traffic Report on the Control Panel on the SCCs Website.

⁹¹⁵ The exact title is: "Critique of the Trinitarian Social Model of Leonardo Boff: Small Christian Communities of the Archdiocese of Tabora, a Case Study."

⁹¹⁶ Wilbert Gobbo, email message to the author dated 1 May, 2013.

⁹¹⁷ The dictionary defines the word coincidence as: "a remarkable concurrence of events or circumstances without apparent causal connection." Christians sometimes see their daily activities and encounters not as a coincidence but rather as a God-incidence. A God-incidence might be defined as: "A happy coincidence or outcome that was most likely directed or orchestrated by God." Another expression is "providential coincidence."

An example: In preparing the "Rite of Committal" for the ashes of my first cousin Louise Headley in the Headley plot at the Lexington Cemetery in Lexington, Kentucky on Saturday, 23 November, 2019, I personally chose the Scripture reading of *Matthew 25:24*: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, says the Lord. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Later I checked the *Ritual* book and this was the very first reading of the many readings suggested. Later when I prepared some reflections for the "Celebration of the Life of Louise Headley" at the reception I chose the text of *Luke 20:38*: "God is not the God of the dead but of the living. All are alive for him." Later I found by God-incidence this was the same text as the Gospel for that day – Saturday of the 33rd Week in Ordinary Time, Year I.

May the good Lord bless you and all your activities! Since yesterday I have been reading different things on the site www.smallchristiancommunities.org and more especially in your Ebook! It is really a treasure in the domain of Small Christian Communities!

The SCC Polls encourage participation⁹¹⁸ and interaction. The first poll began in April, 2009. The poll uses the statement -- **The best part of my Small Christian Community is...** -- followed by five choices that are taken from 1353 important characteristics or features of SCCs as of 24 June, 2020. Based on research (surveys, questionnaires, interviews, conversations, visits to SCCs and meetings/conferences/and workshops on SCCs) we identified these 1353 important characteristics or features of SCCs around the world: 721 on the dynamics of SCCs and 632 on the activities of SCCs.

We change the poll every two months. Tops is January – February, 2018 (769 votes) followed by: September -- October, 2017 (512 votes). March - April, 2018 (455 votes). May-June, 2020 (436 votes). September – October, 2019 (421 votes). March - April, 2017 (410 votes). November – December, 2017 (395 votes). January – February, 2019 (374 votes). January – February, 201 (362 votes). November – December, 2017 (345 votes).

The results (highest number of votes) of the first sixty-seven rounds are as follows:⁹¹⁹

Peer group small Faith-sharing community. 486⁹²⁰
 Mass in the neighborhood. 211
 Special prayers for people with Covid-19. A 136
 Helps deepen our personal relationship with Jesus Christ. A 136
 Personal encounter with Jesus Christ through SCC. A 134
 Sharing life experiences. A 133
 Prayer, reflection and faith-sharing grounds me. A Special Poll 125
 Personal encounter with Jesus Christ through SCC. A 114
 Tool for evangelization today. D 110
 Safe place for people to share and grow. D 108
 Gospel-based faith-sharing. A 108
 Prayer, reflection and faith-sharing grounds me. A 105
 Reaches out to the marginated and those on the periphery of society. A 105
 Way of life, not just a program or project in the parish. D 104
 Empowerment of women. D Special Poll 103

Another expression that has the same meaning is God-moment.

⁹¹⁸ For SCC members in Eastern Africa who do not use electronic devices such as Smart Phones, tablets and computers we poll them verbally and by paper surveys.

⁹¹⁹ Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 18 February, 2018, <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/polls.html>

⁹²⁰ The high number is due to Chinese hackers.

Combines Bible⁹²¹ Sharing and Faith Sharing. A 101
Youth peer group small faith-sharing community. D Special Poll 100

This information gives us a clear picture of the priorities, interests and activities of SCC members around the world. Results of Google Analytics surveys and Facebook surveys also help us to know and understand more about people interested in and involved in SCCs on the different continents. Visitors to the SCCs Website come from 81 countries/territories. The largest number of visitors comes from Kenya, United States, India, Philippines, United Kingdom and South Africa in that order.

As an example, the access to, and use of the website for the period 1- -31 December, 2015:

Language Sessions: % Sessions (by language, country, hits/visits, percentage)

1. en-us 339 72.90%
2. en-gb 48 10.32%
3. en 28 6.02%
4. de 8 1.72%
5. it-it 8 1.72%
6. de-de 6 1.29%
7. it 4 0.86%
8. fr 3 0.65%
9. pl 3 0.65%
10. es 2 0.43%

Search Engine Optimization (SEO) services such as Alexa and Attracta give information on how our SCCs Website is ranked in the most important search engines such as Google, Yahoo and Bing. This helps to increase our brand recognition, web traffic, etc. Helpful information is the top-ranked inbound links to <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>. This serves as a measure of our website's reputation. No. 1 is <http://www.Ebookbrowse.com>, No. 2 is <http://www.catholicweb.com>, No. 3 is <http://www.balancingact-africa.com> and No. 4 is <http://www.afriprov.org>.

As of 16 August, 2016 in the three search engines:

- Entering “Small Christian Communities,” our SCCs Website ranks No. 2 on Yahoo and Bing and No. 7 on Google.
- Entering “SCCs Facebook Page” we rank No. 1 on Google, No. 5 on Bing and No. 13 on Yahoo.

⁹²¹ It has been said that we should preach with the *Bible* in one hand and the newspaper in the other hand. This is based on the famous quotation of Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth: “Take your *Bible* and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your *Bible*.” We can update this to say: “We should preach with the *Bible* in one hand and the BBC World News (that can be found on the radio, TV and the internet that includes video clips) in the other hand. “We should preach with one eye on the *Bible* and the other eye on the BBC World News that can be found on the radio, TV and the internet that includes video clips.” NOTE: The SCCs Website has links to the BBC RSS FEEDS for African News. We can also say: “We should preach with the *Bible* in one hand and our smartphone in the other hand.” “We should preach with one eye on the *Bible* and the other eye on our smartphone.”

- Entering “SCCs Website” we rank No. 6 on Google, No. 13 on Bing and No. 15 on Yahoo.

As of 11 February, 2021 in our browsers: Entering “Small Christian Communities,” our SCCs Website ranks

No. 1 on Google Search Engine (Google, Firefox and Internet Explorer Browsers)
No. 2 on Bing Search Engine (Microsoft Edge Browser)

Many individual SCCs in Africa have their own websites, Facebook Pages, What’sApp Pages and email mailing lists. This activity is growing fast.

- b. Small Christian Communities Facebook Page⁹²² and Groups⁹²³
<https://www.facebook.com/www.smallchristiancommunities.org>

It is noteworthy that after China and India, Facebook is the third largest “nation” in the world with over with 2.27 billion monthly active users as of the third quarter of 2018.

This social network is the most powerful force in the news industry. Live steaming apps made by Facebook and Twitter have succeeded cable TV news networks (channels) such as CNN, Fox News and MSNBC that in turn succeeded traditional TV news networks (channels such as ABC, CBS and NBC). Latest worldwide research shows most of these people log into Facebook on a mobile device.

We started the Small Christian Communities Facebook Page and Groups on 2 February, 2010. The overall goal of our SCCs Facebook Page is to be interactive and participatory with as much two-way sharing and exchange as possible. The Scripture motto of this Facebook Page is *Matthew* 18:20: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” One of the purposes of this social networking page is “to unite all Christians who may want to be members.” Some introductory comments were: “We invite you all to share your experiences as believers, pour forth your encouragement, and keep aflame the Gospel. Post a verse and we’ll all share. Just like early Christians used to do in their communities.” “Let us hope that this Facebook Page will help more young people to get involved in Small Christian Communities (SCCs).” After seven years the page provides a wonderful history of SCCs and an important Archive/Record.

As of 6 January, 2019: Of the first 2,266 “likes” or friends (called the Facebook Fanpage) on the SCCs Facebook Page, 65.6% are male and 34.4% are female. 70.4% are in the 18-44-year-old age bracket. By country, the largest number of fans come from Kenya followed by United States, India, Germany, Tanzania, Nigeria, Uganda, South Africa, Poland

⁹²² Entering the term “Small Christian Communities” (plural) in a Facebook Search on Google, one gets six Facebook pages with these three words at the beginning. Ours is the first listed and has the most members (fans) by far. Plus hundreds of other pages with various names and titles.

⁹²³ This is documented in Francis Njuguna, “Small Christian Communities Now Meet on Facebook,” *The Seed*, December, 2012 (Volume 24, No. 12, Issue 252), retrieved on 28 December, 2012 <http://www.consolatamissionarieskenya.co.ke/?p=468>

and Philippines in that order. By city, the largest number of fans comes from Nairobi followed by Mombasa, Nakuru, Dar es Salaam, Kampala, Nyeri, Lagos and Eldoret in that order.

People post a wide variety of comments on the Facebook Page both under “Notifications” and under “Messages.” Request for prayers for people who are sick or who have died. Spiritual reflections. Spiritual reading. *Bible* reflections.⁹²⁴ Visits to, and activities of, particular SCCs. Requests for information on SCCs. Financial reports. Reminders of updates on the SCCs Website. The wall is particularly active during SCCs courses, workshops, meetings and retreats. An interesting part of the SCCs Facebook Page is the “Share” Feature where the original message is shared/passed on to other Facebook fans and internet groups.

Some comments on the wall of the Facebook Page during the first few months. “At the end of the [Second African Synod](#) of Bishops held in Rome, the *Message to the People of God* uses the African proverb that goes: *An army of well-organized ants can bring down an elephant.* SCCs are an army of well-organized Christians who can help alleviate evil in society.” “The SCCs can be an avenue for environmental care. ‘Going green’ has been a slogan in many commercials. SCCs can make their neighborhood ‘go green.’” “SCCs should play the role of reminding our government leaders and appeal to them for security of life and alleviating poverty. Life is sacred and must be protected and secured. Let’s stand up and talk without fear about the lack of good order. If we don’t talk, who will talk?” “Today’s challenge: How do we use the Social Media/New Media for evangelization especially in Small Christian Communities?”⁹²⁵

“Our new Facebook Page look makes the page look more social and the graphic support is just excellent especially for posting our SCC meetings photos. “It is interesting to see the many people posting on this page and telling us about their SCCs. It is time we created SCC Twinning networks.” “Our new Facebook Page look makes the page look more social and the graphic support is just excellent especially for posting our SCC meetings photos.” “I like the Dandora Youth SCCs in Nairobi and their commitment to evangelization. These are young people evangelizing themselves and others.” “Our SCCs in St. Austin's Parish in Nairobi will have an outdoor Stations of the Cross on Good Friday starting at 8:30 a.m. and walking through the whole parish to reach the main church at 12 Noon.” “May our SCCs spread the Good News of the Risen Christ.”

Then in the past eight years here is a sample of the wide variety of comments and reflections:

“Let us celebrate with the Zambian members of our SCCs Class on Zambia's exciting 1-0 win over Ghana in the semi-finals and sympathy to the Ghana supporters.” “Thank you for taking this SCCs Class photo at Tangaza University College in Nairobi and posting it on our SCCs Facebook Page.” “I feel a terrible loss this evening for the death of our brother

⁹²⁴ Feedback indicates that some people like to read the reflections on the Scripture Readings of the following Sunday so that they participate in various Sunday services well prepared and well informed. However, many people walk into church “cold.”

⁹²⁵ SCCs Facebook Page retrieved on 1 November, 2011
<http://www.face-book.com/pages/Small-Christian-Communities/279921983315>

Francis Mwangi. He was an active and jolly member of our Small Christian Community at Riruta Parish in Nairobi. May God rest his soul in peace.”

“SCCs in Hekima Secondary School in Bukoba, Tanzania that started in 1992. As of 2012 there eight SCCs of Catholic girls and one SCC of girls of different Protestant denominations. These SCC members met every Monday to read and reflect on the *Bible* passages related to formation of youth and liturgical themes. These students are very active in participating in various religious activities and helping one another.”

“Today in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania I participated in the Saints Cosmas and Damian SCC of Medical Students at Muhumbili Hospital. About 30 members shared reflections on today's Gospel. These kinds of Youth SCCs are very important. “

“I arrived in Jinja, Uganda one month ago and right now I am inserting myself into the program. I already started work at Holy Cross Lake View Senior Secondary School. We have about 900 students. They are soon closing. I intend to begin the SCCs next term when they come back. Already the idea is received well by the chaplain of the school.”

“The new SCCs book good news for us. We will make good use of it here in building Faith-sharing communities in the townships of South Africa where they are stricken by poverty, crime, unemployment and faith crisis.”

“SCCs started in the Archdiocese of Lagos, Nigeria in 1977 through the effort of the priests at Regina Mundi Catholic Church. However, by late 1980s the SCCs nosedived. In 1992 they became alive again.”

“University Students SCC gathering in Bochum, Germany: We now have five meetings since February, 2012. The attendance averages six but we are about nine students. The meeting takes place in the Church premise at 7 p.m. on Thursdays. Our initial meetings were every three weeks. Recently the group decided to meet every week and I encouraged them to do.”

“The July, 2012 issue of the *National Mirror* (monthly newspaper of the Kenya Catholic Bishops Conference) on page 13 has a full page spread of eight photographs of SCCs in Nairobi. Can be seen on online in the "Photo Gallery" Section of the SCCs Website at: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/photo-gallery.html>.

“On the CORO FM Radio Program in Nairobi on Sunday, 1 July the hour devoted to ‘Mwaki’ (Gikuyu name for SCCs) is ‘Civic Education in Kenya Before the 2013 General Election’ (Swahili *jukumu la kuelimisha raia*). Please tell your friends to listen.”

“Father Aloysius Bukenya, AJ, the Rector of the Apostles of Jesus Major Seminary in Nairobi, Kenya, writes: ‘The SCCs at our seminary have already started [for this semester]. Last Thursday we met and prayerfully reflected on the Gospel reading of the 19th Sunday B. I am a regular participant with the SCC of St. Monica. This is my base SCC, but I feel indebted to visit other SCCs. We start our prayer meetings at 6.30 am and end at 7.15 am when we move to the main church for Mass. Please come and support this new way of being church any Thursday.’”

“At our Local Church in Bungoma, Western Kenya when hundreds were confirmed, the bishop encouraged all Christians to take SCC activities seriously as they form the backbone for the growth and development of our Faith.”

“I am glad to be a member of an SCC. I not only grow spiritually but also socially, emotionally, morally and academically. Our SCC is about brotherhood and sisterhood. It is the most appropriate group to join while in college and I urge all Christian youth to join a SCC. We also need to choose groups and friends wisely. Join and stick to a SCC and God will take an upper hand in your life.”

“Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, MAfr, Bishop Emeritus of Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi and one of the founding fathers of SCCs in the AMECEA Region, died on Monday, 24 September, 2012. May he rest in peace. One Malawian priest said: "Surely, Kalilombe will be remembered locally and internationally as a visionary bishop and dedicated African theologian. He endeavored to see the Local Church grow and mature so as to live the life of communion and to be self-reliant, self-propagating and self-ministering. I am very confident that the new way of being Church which he championed in implementing the Vatican Council II's Ecclesiology of communion will be revitalized by the new position he will acquire in heaven of interceding for us who living in 'a new way' in the Church.”

“On 13 October 2012 we had a Day of Recollection at the Capuchin Novitiate with some Youth SCC members from Good Shepherd Parish in Lusaka, Zambia. These youth came from St. Vincent's SCC. The parish is run by the Missionaries of Africa. The theme of the recollection was Mary and the rosary bearing in mind that the month of October is the month dedicated to Our Lady. The animator was Friar Augustine Mwape, a Capuchin priest and a former student at Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya. The church is indeed alive in Zambia.”

“I'm a mainline Protestant pastor but this looks great...can I join?”

“Here are some concrete suggestions and ideas on how Small Christian Communities (SCCs) can emphasize and promote the 2012-2013 Year of Faith in the Catholic Church: Through SCCs we can share among members the various pillars of our faith such as the Creed, meaning of the saints, Mass and life after death. We can read and analyze additional *Bible* study materials after every meeting.”

“To increase interest in our SCCs Website the ‘BBC RSS Feeds for African News’ is now permanently on the bottom left hand side of the ‘Africa Page.’”
<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/africa.html>

“As we continue to hear of war, tribalism, violence and death in Africa (DRC, Egypt, Kenya, Mali, Somalia, South Sudan and so on) may our SCC members pray extra hard that Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, transform hearts and minds to bring about a new lasting peace this Christmas.”

“Hello, guys. Due to the death of Brian Jnr., brother to Vicky, Linet and Nicole in St. Gonza SCC phase 2 in Nairobi, we meet every day at their home, near the Co-op Bank for prayers and to console the family @ 6pm. Let's us keep Jnr and the family in prayers. God bless.”

“How do you find out what JNNKs mean to the local folks? I invited several folks from the Kamati Tendaji of the parish council over for dinner in the rectory here in Dar es Salaam. The M/kiti, who is a really fine man, said that JNNKs are a good thing because that way the "Church" (meaning the hierarchical, institutional church) can reach the lay people

more easily and tell them what they should be doing! It occurs to me that that's probably the operative understanding for a lot of people. But how can the JNNKs become what they're meant to be?"

Alphonse Omolo (alphonseomolo@gmail.com) has written a very interesting message to Members of the FISH (that originated in Kisumu, Kenya) and the FISH Alumni saying: "I would like to invite you to join an online group to evangelize one another and the world just the way we do in the FISH Group or other SCCs but now using the cyberspace. I am aware that most of the current members or Alumni members are spread nationally, regionally and even internationally, but all can benefit from an online Skype *Bible* sharing meetings just as it is done in the FISH and our 'Duondes' and 'Tienges' (SCCs)."

"The Official Launch of the 2013 Kenya Lenten Campaign (like a huge "Peace Rally" to prepare for the General Elections on 4 March, 2013) will take place on Saturday, 9 February, 2013 at Nyayo Stadium in Nairobi, Kenya starting with a concelebrated Mass at 10 a.m. We hope many SCC Members will participate."

Father Harrison Yaa in Mombasa Archdiocese, Kenya writes: "At our Annual General Meeting the 80 priests were quite positive on the pastoral activities and the current performance of our pastoral team in the archdiocese. All the priests agreed that we have to do a lot of training in our parish SCCs."

"Another good example of the SCCs' involvement in justice and peace in Africa is that SCC members in Kenya are volunteering to be Observers (Monitors) in the 4 March, 2013 General Elections in Kenya."

"By using the three steps of "See," "Judge" and "Act" the SCC members can 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")."

Belza Elia Ramos in San Antonio, Texas, USA writes: "In this Year of Faith and following Pope Benedict's call to a New Evangelization in the Catholic Church, a group of parishioners at St. Brigid is in the process of starting a School of Evangelization using the St. Andrew Pastoral Project model. These parishioners have participated in two of the courses of the St. Andrew School of Evangelization on "New Life" and "Emmaus." Members of our Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are involved."

"The Installation Mass of Pope Francis will take place at St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican (Rome, Italy) on Tuesday, 19 March, 2013. May our SCC members around the world watch and participate using our TVs, radios, laptops, tablets, cellphones, etc."

"The members of St. Francis SCC in St. John the Evangelist Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya clapped and jumped up and down when they heard about the name of the new pope -- Pope Francis."

"As an example of practical action our special AMECEA SCCs Training Team Fund (*Mfuko wa Jumuiya* in Swahili) has helped Samuel Mbiti of St. Francis Assisi SCC in Kitui Diocese, Kenya to buy one cow for ploughing to help the self-reliance of his farming project."

“Today I assisted to preside over the elections of new officials at St. Anthony Abbot Small Christian Community at Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish in Nairobi. The elections of the officials were mainly unanimous, with the top leadership (Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer) going to women while the men took up assistant positions. It is interesting how the basic church in the neighborhood continues to take shape with women at the center stage of leadership.” And a response: “This is an interesting shift and shows how SCCs are evolving as a ‘new way of being church.’ I have just finished correcting the SCCs Course Papers at Tangaza University College in Nairobi. A number of the papers show men in Kenya resisting women in leadership roles. These men have to be challenged to understand equality and democracy in leadership at the SCCs level.”

From RENEW International: “What a wonderful opportunity for sharing across cultures!” (on a Skype Video Chat of four children, two Franciscan Religious Sisters of the Immaculate and one SCC lay leader from the *Amani na Wema* ["Peace and Goodness"] Home in St. Kizito SCC in St. Austin's Parish, Nairobi, Kenya sharing with 37 children and two teachers from the Fifth Grade at St. Patrick's School, Chatham, New Jersey, USA on 30 April, 2013).

Wilbert Gobbo, MAfr in Abidjan, Ivory Coast writes:

“THE COPERNICAN ECCLESIAL REVOLUTION: THE SCCs PARADIGM SHIFT

1. St. Cyprian: “Outside the Church there is no salvation” (*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*)!
2. Karl Rahner: “Outside Christ there is no salvation” (*Extra Christum nulla salus*)!
3. Edward Schillebeeckx: “Outside the world there is no *salvation*” (*Extra mundum nulla salus*)!
4. I believe where SCCs are active, a Christian can feel that living “outside the SCC there is no salvation” (*extra SCC nulla salus*) and that where there is the SCC there God is present (*Ubi SCC, ibi Deus est*)! A Christian who participates actively in the life of the SCC is “not far from the Kingdom”!

SCCs are the present and the future of the Church. According to many thinkers, the SCCs entail the rebirth of the Church (*ecclesiogenesis*⁹²⁶). The SCCs are the reinvention of

⁹²⁶ This is the theme of Leonardo Boff's important book *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*. In commenting on the CEBs in Latin America, Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga stated that they have to reinvent themselves in the light of the new historical, political, social and economic realities of Latin America. American Maryknoll missionary priest and theologian Father Steve Judd, MM says that there are different models and names for SCCs/BECs/CEBs in Latin America. The name CEBs is popular in Brazil (Father José Marin). Bolivia, Chile, Mexico, Peru and Venezuela have all different styles, approaches and language. Some examples:

- Huli Prelature in Peru: The farmers (*campesinos*) calls them Committed Christian Communities (CCCs).
- Lima, Peru: The Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutierrez would move between his classroom teaching in the university in the academic year and the base communities in the *barrios* during the holidays. These communities were not parish-based, not “ecclesial” but linked to the See -- Discern (formerly Judge) – Act Model of the Young Christian Workers (Cardinal Joseph Cardijn).

the Church. The SCCs are a new way of being Church. The SCCs are a new model of the Church. I have an insight (a “startling strangeness”) that the SCCs can be considered as a *Locus theologicus* just like the *loci theologici* of Scripture (*Scriptura*) and Apostolic Tradition (*Traditio Apostolica*)! I am very much interested in doing research on SCCs!”

“Today I fly to Rome and then on to the USA. I am carrying a packet of rosaries (including the World Mission Rosary) of members of my St. Kizito SCC here in Nairobi. I will attend the General Audience of Pope Francis in St. Peter's Basilica Square on Wednesday, 8 May and hold up these rosaries to be St. by our new Pope.”

From Dela Caesar in Sunyani, Ghana: “Here in Sunyani the SCCs concept has not yet been fully developed. They are still practicing the larger type of SCCs, but gradually I am sharing the idea with the pastoral team.”

Sharing from the St. Gonzaga Gonza SCC Youth Group (Nairobi, Kenya) Facebook Page: "Thanks a lot guyz for making PENTECOST FEAST a success. We celebrated the birth of the early church and more especially the birth of Small Christian Communities. As a St. Gonzaga Gonza SCC member I thank you for the role you've played in building it and growing it. Just know that it is your responsibility to make Gonza grow more. Therefore ask yourself what role you've played to make our *jumu* better. A simple phone call/visit to a 'lost' member can go a long way. It's in the simple things we do that shows how much we care for our brethren. Therefore what will you do? Apart from that there's a prayer request from our colleague Janice. Her mom is very sick, therefore keep her in prayer."

From Michael Meyer: "The next Sunday is the feast of the Holy Trinity. In Bolivia it was the national day for the CEBs. God is communion, communication – that`s the basic idea of the CEBs."

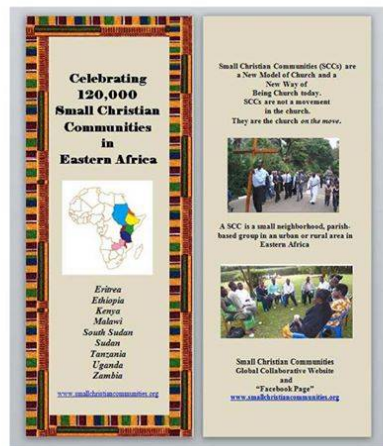
Judd says: “This is a different moment, a transitional moment for the CEBs in Latin America. There is no cookie cutter model. There is no one size fits all model. We need plasticity in the parish structure.” Conversations with the author, Maryknoll, NY, 16 December, 2014 and 16 April, 2024.

As the pastoral model of neighborhood parish-based SCCs started in Eastern Africa, Father Joseph Glynn, MM, the Maryknoll Society Regional Superior in Africa, heard about the ministry of Gustavo Gutierrez with the base communities in Peru. So in 1968 he sent Maryknoll priest Michael Kirwen, MM to visit Latin America to learn about the SCC experience. He visited Maryknollers in the following countries: Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama and Peru. He did not find SCCs as we have them in Eastern Africa, that is, pastoral parish based SCCs. Rather Latin America had a wide variety of the social action model of base communities that were not connected to the parish. They were especially connected to the preferential option of the poor living at the base of society. Michael Kirwen’s conversation with the author, Maryknoll, NY, 16 April, 2024.

Applied to Africa and the whole world, SCCs are challenged to reinvent/reinvigorate/renew themselves in the context of new local and global realities. This is a key part of ongoing contextualization and inculturation. ??

Sharing from the St. Gonzaga Gonza SCC Youth Group (Nairobi, Kenya) Facebook Page: “On a sad note, Janice's mom passed away on Thursday 23 May and will be laid to rest this Friday 31 May. The least we can do is to ensure that we send representatives to be there at the burial. Fare to and from Chuka is 1,200 Kenyan shillings per person. Feel free to give your contributions by Thursday.”

“The RENEW Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Gala in West Orange, New Jersey, USA was a big success. Here is the SCCs bookmark that was given to everyone at the dinner. The Powerpoint Presentation that ran all evening on a continuous loop is entitled “PP Presentation on ‘SCCs in Eastern Africa’ at the RENEW Gala in West Orange, NJ, USA on 6 June, 2013” and can be found under “United States of America” under “North America” at: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/north-america/united-states-of-america/245-pp-presentation-on-sccs-in-eastern-africa-at-the-renew-gala-in-west-orange-nj-usa-on-6-june-2013.html>



“Next Sunday, the 7th of July, is the Fourteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time and the Gospel reading is *Luke* 10:1-12, 17-20. Our online Skype SCC will be meeting this Tuesday to reflect upon this Gospel reading. Please join us via Skype, leave us your comments/reflections on Facebook below, or email Alphonse Omolo at: alphoncomolo@gmail.com.”

“Prayer is important for SCCs members. In the SCC Polls on our SCCs Website <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/> since we started in April, 2009 the third highest vote has been for: ‘Prays together for the needs of others.’ Let us pray for peaceful elections in Zimbabwe on 31 July, 2013.”

New book in English: Krämer, Klaus and Vellguth, Klaus (eds.), *Small Christian Communities: Fresh Stimulus for a Forward-looking Church*, Volume 2, "Theology of One World" series of Missio Aachen, Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2013. It has five chapters on Africa including Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, “Small Christian Communities as a New Way of Becoming Church: Practice, Progress and Prospects;” Joseph Healey, “Historical Development of the Small Christian Communities/Basic Ecclesial Communities in Africa” and Pius Rutechura, “The Pastoral Vision of Basic Christian Communities/Ecclesial Communities.”

From Frans Wijzen: "The bishops in the Netherlands chose SCCs as their priority for the Lenten Campaign."

From Irene Wilson in Melbourne, Australia: "There are some signs of new SCC growth coming out of Perth, the capital city of Western Australia. It is being driven by one Fr. Paschal Kearney, an Irish born priest who was in Nigeria and Sierra Leone for many years, now involved with the Adult Catholic Faith Formation Center in Perth. Therese Denny who works in the Broome Diocese up north did a Master's Degree on this very subject in New Orleans with our friends there. And here in Melbourne I perceive a new flush of groups, perhaps still in the early days of formation -- those interested in participating would be after renewal and reform in the church."

"A valuable lectionary-based Faith-sharing resource is: *Fall Quest 2013: A Reflection Booklet for Small Christian Communities*. This is a Sunday Scripture-based reflection booklet for use by those who gather weekly in Small Christian Communities. Each weekly unit offers the elements for a complete small community session."

"Here at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana, USA Father Bob Pelton and Father Joe Healey are working on plans for a live, online, virtual interactive International Video Conference on "Small Christian Communities: The Church on the Move Around the World" involving 50 people in 18 countries. It will be a three hour conference that uses WebEx Meetings Technology and is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, 12 February, 2014. Suggestions are welcome."

Someone wrote from Nairobi, Kenya: "I am getting more involved with the SCCs. I find that they are so dominated by elderly women that the men and the youth do not want to be involved." Any suggestions and ideas?

Report from Mrs. Joanne Miya in Mwanza, Tanzania. "In Tanzania we would appreciate if you could also share some of the challenges facing SCCs (JNNK in Swahili) especially for our folks coming to Tanzania. I wish the JNNK were all like the stories in the books, but they are not. In some parishes of Tanzania the JNNK are experiencing poor attendance because they are being seen as mere instruments the Catholic Church uses to collect financial contributions (*michango* – contributions for ordinations, building cathedrals, for seminaries, development funds, to pay for meetings of the bishops, etc.). The parishes or bishop assign a set amount to be raised by each *jumuiya* and before one collection is finished another one is being asked for. This is a major reason that many people have stopped attending JNNK. Also in many parishes you cannot take a leadership position in a JNNK if you are not married in the church so it eliminates a lot of good people from ever being in leadership. They elect leaders who have all the necessary *cheti* but not necessarily the best people for the job. This is the reality that our lay missionaries walk into when they join a JNNK. So it is important that they know the whole story. JNNK have great potential and I'm sure that things vary from parish to parish but this has been our experience, especially in the Archdiocese of Mwanza where we all work."

We want to make this SCCs Facebook Page a forum for discussion on SCCs topics. Chripin Onyango from Kenya writes: "Many people tend to leave SCCs because some of their pastors are using them as a means of getting their own money. Some Xtians say that SCCs have changed to be groups for pastors to use to enrich themselves. And I think that's why most men do not attend SCCs. So what is your take on this matter?"

“The Annual Walk in Support of the Cause of Beatification and Canonization of Servant of God Cardinal Maurice Otunga flagged off at approximately 8 a.m. on Saturday, 28 September, 2013 at the Holy Family Basilica, Nairobi, Kenya. Nine members of St. Kizito SCC sponsored Annastasia S. Muli with a donation of 2,300/= Kenya Shillings (approximately \$4).”

“SCC members in Kenya are invited to participate in the “October Missionary Month⁹²⁷ Activity Calendar.” For 2013 this includes the following:

1st – 6th October: WEEK OF PRAYER
 7th -- 13th October: WEEK OF SUFFERING
 14th – 20th October: WEEK OF SOLIDARITY
 21st -- 27th October: WEEK OF THANKSGIVING

The highlight will be World Mission Sunday on 20 October, 2013 with the theme: “Go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:18 –20). You are invited to share your experiences and reflections on this SCCs Facebook Page.”

“Here is an interesting pastoral exchange:

Writer No 1: “These small groups [SCCs], breaking open the word of God in more consistent and extended ways every time they meet, help believers experience the power of the word through reflection, discussion, personal sharing and common prayer. Making *Lectio Divina* a part of small group sharing can be a way to link Catholics to experiences of contemplation and adoration, as the Word leads them to fuller awareness and acceptance of God’s action in their lives.”

Writer No. 2: "Question: From your experience, is *Lectio Divina* more a time for listening to, receiving and sharing how the Word is experienced by anyone individual, or does it include a discussion of faith issues that might surface? My concern is that the gatherings might become a means of 'churchy' discussions and not a listening to, and sharing of, the experience of God's Word in one's life. Any thoughts how we might address this potential conflict? Maybe it is not even a conflict!"

Writer No 1: "You raise a very important question that I have reflected on and researched extensively.

The weekly (ideally) “lectionary-based Faith-sharing” of a SCC should have a prayerful, reflective style/quality/spirit. This is enhanced/deepened by the *Lectio Divina* style or approach. But what can often happen is that this prayerful, reflective style changes into a discussion group style. I can tell when this is happening by the tone of voice of the speaker and the words used. It happened several times during our four week Pilot Project in July, 2013. We left our Faith-sharing and went into discussing pastoral issues in the parish. Then, exactly as you say, a “churchy” discussion takes over rather than a listening to, and sharing

⁹²⁷ October was chosen as a missionary month to commemorate the discovery of the American continent that opened a new page in the history of evangelization. Columbus Day that is annually on the second Monday of October remembers Christopher Columbus' arrival to the Americas on 12 October, 1492.

of, the experience of God's Word in one's life.

The key is that the facilitator has to bring the small group back "on track." This is why training the facilitators in how to lead the group and in basic group dynamics is so important. The facilitator has to regularly remind his or her group (and especially new members) of the prayerful, reflective style of Faith-sharing that they want to model.

What works for us here in Eastern Africa is that **AFTER** the "lectionary-based Faith-sharing" on the Gospel of the following Sunday is over, we might have a short discussion of pastoral issues in the SCC and parish, for example, a young couple wants to have their baby baptized."

NOTE: Please add your own comments below.

1. "It takes a good accompaniment by the pastor."
2. If the "lectionary-based Faith-sharing" in a SCC is weekly, it is richer and deeper following the readings of the liturgical cycle.

"Seven representatives of Ngong Diocese, Kenya participated in the 2013 Lumko East Africa Course: three catechists, two religious sisters, one laywoman and one priest.⁹²⁸ They are planning a follow-up Training the Trainers (TOT) SCCs Workshop in early 2014. The three representatives from the Ngong Diocesan Pastoral Office wrote: "It is through applying the pastoral methodology like the Seven Steps, Group Response, Look-Listen-Love and Life-*Bible* Notes that we internalize the Word of God and solve situations affecting the life of a Small Christian Community."

"The AMECEA Countries have starting preparing for the Extraordinary World Synod of Bishops on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization," to take place in Rome from 5-19 October, 2014. We are working on the answers to the questions at the end of the eight-page "Lineamenta." The Vatican has asked national bishops' conferences around the world to conduct a wide-ranging poll of Catholics asking for their opinions on church teachings on family, marriage, contraception, same-sex marriage and divorce. Archbishop Lorenzo Baldisseri, secretary general of the Vatican's Synod of Bishops, asked the conferences to distribute the poll "immediately as widely as possible to deaneries and parishes so that input from local sources can be received." Our SCCs can give their comments and input through their parishes and directly to Rome."

"We ask prayers for six African members of the Holy Cross Congregation who will be taking their perpetual profession of vows and diaconate ordination in Kampala, Uganda on 4/5 January, 2014. They are alumni of our SCCs Class at Tangaza University College in Nairobi including Alex Okidi, CSC and Francis Mukasa, CSC. Wanajumuiya, oyee!"

"We describe our weekly SCCs meetings as 'lectionary-based Faith-sharing.' Practically, during this just closed 'Year of Faith,' how has our faith as a small community deepened during the past year? How have we supported and inspired each other in living our Christian faith and sharing it with others? How have we reflected on the challenges of our daily lives in the light of the Sunday Gospel readings?"

⁹²⁸ Kenyan diocesan priest Father Edward Mashua said that the workshop was "of great assistance to me and my parish of Mulot" that presently has 70 SCCs. Conversation with the author in Ngong, Kenya on 15 April, 2014.

“The lectionary-based *Bible* sharing in our St. Mary's SCC in Lusaka, Zambia was so enriching. We realized that Zambian youth today are so busy preparing for Christmas without understanding the meaning of Advent and what to do during this period. In fact, preparations for the coming Christmas celebrations have hijacked the meaning of this Advent season. A challenge to us all is: Do we understand the meaning of Advent and how can we take Advent to the secular world?”

“Archbishop Tarcisius Ziyaye opened the SCCs Workshop with a talk on ‘SCCs as the AMECEA Pastoral Priority.’ It was touching to know that he was part of the Lilongwe Diocesan Mini-Synod as a seminarian in 1973-1975 when the SCCs were established in Malawi.”

“On Christian Eve I joined three leaders of our St. Kizito SCC in St. Austin Parish, Nairobi, Kenya to bring gifts of flour, sugar and cooking fat to five needy families in the local area.”

“Prayers, please, for our course, "Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today," that begins at two theological colleges in Nairobi, Kenya on 8 January, 2014. We will begin by asking all SCCs to pray for ‘Peace in South Sudan.’ Let us be thankful that our bishops and church leaders in Eastern Africa see the value of SCCs courses in our seminaries and theological institutes.”

From Amie Ilva Tatem in New York City, USA: “The *Bible* Study (primary group) should, I believe, be in the Church, as a weekly offering. I know of one Lutheran church in Manhattan (St. Peter's) that does *Bible* Study & dinner. Anyone is welcome. Could we be so creative? Home groups could branch off from the primary church group. In Manhattan, with the multitude of Catholic churches....where is the *Bible* Study...perhaps in one or two. Rare. As the article points out, with church closures, shortages of priests and nuns...the laity (deacons...including women deacons) will be used more. Could this be a message from God?”

“How are our SCCs celebrating the great missionary feast of the Epiphany on 5 January, 2014? We begin the year by celebrating that” all nations shall come to God’s light.” This can be the annual celebration of Pontifical Missionary Childhood (PMC) Day. Please post reports of what you are doing?” Some answers:

1. In the Shared Homily at the Maryknoll Society House in Nairobi, Kenya we referred to the missionary outreach of SCCs to needy people, to the homeless and to those Pope Francis calls “the margined and those on the periphery of society.” “Periphery” is not a geographical or locational word – as in far out in the rural area or in the boondocks. It can be at the “center” – meaning in the middle of a city. It is where the *anawim*, the especially needy and vulnerable people are living, or better, surviving.
2. The homily at St. Austin’s Parish in Nairobi, Kenya emphasized the missionary spirit of the Feast of the Epiphany and encouraged SCC members to love one another and to help to poor.

“Here in Saint James Catholic Church, Moshono Parish, Arusha Archdiocese, Tanzania we have SCC meetings every Saturday at 6.30 a.m. in order to allow people to be

free in the afternoon. It is also due to the fact many people are business people so they cannot make to attend *jumuiya* services in the evening. Today I had mass with St. Joseph the Worker SCC. This mass was intended to pray and ask God to journey with all the members, and to ask the gift of the Holy Spirit to lead and empower them throughout this new year 2014. *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo oyee!*”

“FACEBOOK is not just about socialization...it is rather a very important means for EVANGELIZATION.....especially the youth who are main stake holders of the same.”

“SCCs are the root of the church in Zambia and the world over. At St. Anthony of Christ the King Parish in Livingstone we meet every Sunday afternoon as young people for *Bible* sharing and other spiritual activities. May God bless all SCCs. If you are not going, give it a try. It’s interesting.”

“The SCC are the units that have the Word of God as the center. Around them the Christian families ‘learn to live ecclesial life and reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel’ (*EIA*, 89). So last Saturday 11 January, 2014 we reflected on the orphans and their problems. So at the end of our SCC meeting we decided to visit some orphanages in Arusha, Tanzania so today we went to visit *Kituo cha Afya* Orphanage supervised by a Catholic couple. We were like God-sent messengers. We were 69 members from different SCCs of our parish. The majority were women (35), 15 men and 10 children. Dear brothers and sisters, let us live the gospel in word and actions.”

“Thank you all for your prayers. Our wedding in Doonholm Parish in Nairobi was a big success.”

“Just gave a talk on YSCCs (Youth Small Christian Communities) to the Lusaka East Deanery, Zambia during a Leadership Workshop.”

“I am positive that all members of St Bakhita SCC are looking forward to tomorrow's SCCs class of training of trainers! See you!”

“From the Bishop-elect Moses Hamungole of Monze Diocese, Zambia: ‘Thank you so much for the message and for your friendship. As you know I will need your prayers and help to meet the challenges of building active Small Christian Communities. I am also aware that of the expectations of colleagues in the communications apostolate. Please, pray for me!’”

“Our International SCCs Webinar (Web Conference) went well. Getting the technology to work at our Nairobi Hub was a minor miracle. Ten representatives from Kenya and Tanzania (four laywomen, three laymen, two priests and one religious sister) participated. Many challenges and opportunities especially promoting Youth SCCs.”

“It is wonderful to be on the St. Isidore Small Christian Community Skype platform. Last week, this week and always, we have had wonderful and insightful sharing on the ensuing Sunday Gospel readings. The sessions have always reawakened in me the need to do more in my service to Christ and humanity. Thanks team St. Isidore and God bless. We meet again on Tuesday next week.”

Magazine Just Published in Nairobi, Kenya: “Small Christian Communities,” Dossier in *New People*, No. 149, March-April, 2014, 20- 26. Includes Laurenti Magesa, “The Joy of Community in Small Christian Communities;” Joseph Healey, “Pope Francis: SCCs: Word of

God, Social Commitment, New Lay Services and Education in Faith;" and Joseph Healey, "The Role of the Youth in the SCCs." Enjoy!

"Three scholarships are available to young people in Eastern Africa (committed young adults under 30 years old) to the three-week Lumko SCCs Workshop in Nairobi, Kenya in September, 2014. You are welcome to apply."

From Beatrice Odera: "Consolata seminarians went to the Langata West Prison in Nairobi, Kenya and were able to talk to the prisoners on "2014 Kenyan Lenten Campaign" and shared with them the booklets as well. They also met the prison staff at the chapel where they had sufficient time to share with them the weekly topics and the booklets."

"As 'follow-down' to our 12 February, 2014 International SCCs Webinar, concerning our African Continent's 'Plan of Action' we have added two young people to our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team: 28-year-old Kenyan Mr. Peter Kyalo (member of the St. Joseph SCC, Doonholm Parish, Nairobi), the Assistant Administrator of the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, has joined the team especially for tech support. 22-year-old Zambian Miss Albina Chishimba Chishimba (member of St. Maximillian Kolbe YSCC, Cathedral of the Child Jesus Parish, Lusaka), the Vice Chairperson of the Zambia National Council for Catholic Youth (ZNCCY) has joined the team for outreach to youth especially in Zambia. Much of their SCCs ministry will be done online."

Jumuiya ndogo ndogo, oyeeee!!!!!! Wanajumuiya, following the delegation I was given to help collect some money and gifts towards this year Lenten Campaign in Tangaza University College Nairobi towards supporting starving and suffering people in the Marsabit Region, we managed to collect Kenya Shillings. 2,100. We presented it to the office and the receipt is with us. Thank you very much for your contributions and may God bless you all as we go out to put into practice all that we have learned in class through Father Joseph Healey, *kijana wa zamani/mzee kijana*, and the many visitors who shared with us their practical experience in the various SCCs. God bless us all."

Announcement:
1 to 27 September, 2014
Lumko East Africa SCCs Workshop
Mary Ward Centre
Nairobi, Kenya

For the invitation letter, application form and more information, please contact:
Sister Ephigenia W. Gachiri IBVM (Coordinator)
Email: ephigachiri@yahoo.co.uk

From Bishop Thomas Dabre of Pune, India: "I wish to thank you for the report of the Web Conference on SCC. I am so sorry that because of my own difficulties I could not participate in the conference. I am very happy that for so many years SCC work has been going on in different countries of the world."

"SCC members in Kenya are praying for the repose of the soul of Archbishop Boniface Lele who died this week. He was the Emeritus Archbishop of Mombasa, Kenya and a very caring, pastoral bishop who supported SCCs very much."

“On Sunday, 27 April, 2014 (two weeks from today) Popes John XXIII and John Paul II will be canonized saints in Rome. Please post your memories and reflections of these two great people on this Facebook Page. Are any SCCs named after them? How do they inspire SCCs members? Welcome.”

“In 2014 the monthly ‘*Mwaki*’ (Gikuyu for ‘SCC’) Radio Program on CORO FM (KBC) in Nairobi is focusing on ‘SCCs Promote the Pastoral Care of Family and Marriage.’ The 20 April, 2014 radio program had a panel of five SCC members talking about ‘helping marriages with problems.’ Also the *Miaki* (SCCs) in Kenya are invited to contribute to the Cardinal Otunga Beatification Fund.”

“Today, 25 April, is World Malaria Day (WMD). WMD is one of eight official global public health campaigns currently marked by the World Health Organization (WHO), along with World Health Day, World Blood Donor Day, World Immunization Week, World Tuberculosis Day, World No Tobacco Day, World Hepatitis Day and World AIDS Day. How are our SCCs in Africa involved in the campaign to eradicate malaria?”

From Sister Rita Ishengoma, STH: "Greetings from Mwanza, Tanzania where I participated in the Mission Awareness Committee (MAC) Meeting and Seminar at the Nyegezi Retreat House. My talk was on "SCCs and MAC." When I will arrive in my own Bukoba Diocese we have the meeting with Bishop Method Kilaini. We proposed a team of two Sisters, two priests and one layman to see how we can improve our SCCs and start MAC.”

“47 people participated in a Mwanza Metropolitan Workshop on the theme ‘Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Embrace the Word of God’ at the St. Dominic Pastoral Centre in Mwanza, Tanzania from 19 to 22 May, 2014. Participants included representatives from the eight dioceses of the Lake Victoria Zone in northwestern Tanzania (Mwanza Archdiocese and the dioceses of Bukoba, Bunda, Geita, Kayunga, Musoma, Rulenge Ngara and Shinyanga): one archbishop, one bishop, 11 priests, 5 religious sisters, 21 laymen and 8 laywomen.”

“Congratulations to all the fans of the Kenya Harambee Stars National Football (Soccer) Team in our SCCs Courses and Workshops. They settled for a 1-1 draw with Comoros Islands in a 2015 African Cup of Nations qualifier on Friday, 30 May. This result was enough for them to progress into the second round of the qualifiers to be played at the end of July/beginning of August. Harambee Stars, oyee!”

At the request of some people we have revised and updated the

"1961-- 2015 Timeline in the History and Development of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa Especially Eastern Africa"

on the SCCs Website. You can find it at the top of the Home Page as No. 1 under “Africa Continent” under “Africa.” The link is:

<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/timeline.pdf>

“Today is the feast of the Holy Trinity. Many analogies exist to explain the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Here is a modern one. Imagine the Father as the invisible CPU in a computer; the Son is the visible monitor and the manifestation of their deeds is the printed output. Where are we then? Of course, the blank paper that was willingly fed into the printer.

If we subject ourselves to the will of the Trinity we will be transformed from emptiness to substance.”

Report from Bishop Method Kilaini after the Mwanza, Tanzania Metropolitan SCC Workshop in May, 2014: "Since I came back to Bukoba from Mwanza I have going around the parishes for pastoral visits. I can assure you that everywhere the SCCs were foremost in my activities and instructions."

AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Workshop
30 August, 2014 to 1 September, 2014
Maryknoll Society House (near Lavington)
Nairobi, Kenya

This workshop especially for young people will focus on two topics:

1. Increasing Online SCCs Networking.
2. Starting Youth SCCs in Eastern Africa.

On both Saturday, 30 August and Monday, 1 September we will meet from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Lunch is included. You are welcome to participate in both days or just one day. Please tell other young people about this workshop. Welcome!”

“Am right in Lilongwe, Malawi and will attend the mass for the launch of the AMECEA Plenary on 16 July. Some bishops have begun arriving. The president of Malawi will give the opening speech. Parishes in Lilongwe have been appointed a bishop who will celebrate one Sunday mass. Archbishop Ziyaye is encouraging the lay people to attend the opening of the AMECEA meeting.”

During the Zambia Episcopal Conference group discussion at the AMECEA Plenary in Malawi on the topic presented by Father Clement Majawa whose emphasis was on the role of family and Small Christian Communities, it was discussed that SCCs should be forums to share the main realities of life and society and not be a lecturer theatre. Christians should have the opportunity to evangelize to each other, share light moments such as birthdays, discuss real issues such as youth unemployment, violence and how they can curb certain vices of society. For it is in these SCCs that people should feel a sense of belonging hence SCCs being a pastoral necessity in Africa today for they make Africans feel at home.

From a priest in Rosary Church, Kowloon, Hong Kong: "I am giving your Ebook on 'SCCs in Eastern Africa' to the Nigerian community here. They don't have much access to news about the church anywhere in Africa. Now with the Ebola outbreak, they are postponing trips back home and worried about their families. Maybe your book will give them some clues about how to gather and support one another in prayer."

“During our Second Theological Colloquium on Church, Religion and Society in Africa (TCCRSA II) in Nairobi, Kenya. 6 --8 August, 2014 the Prayer Services and Masses focused on our deceased African theologians and African leaders whom we call our revered ancestors in Christ. We mentioned Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, MAfr, the Bishop of Lilongwe Diocese in Malawi who died in 2012, Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, the Bishop of Rulenge Diocese in Tanzania who died in 2002 and Cardinal Joseph Malula, the Archbishop of Kinshasa Archdiocese in DRC who died in 1989. All three were pioneers in developing SCCs in Africa.”

From Bishop Fritz Lobinger in Mariannhill, South Africa: "For me it was a bit shocking to hear how the population in all rural dioceses is dwindling, also in the area of my former diocese Aliwal North. School classrooms are getting empty because the families move away into the cities and churches are also getting empty. And I also hear that the priests are no longer as enthusiastic about Small Christian Communities as they were thirty years ago. The bishops know about the value of SCCs and try to promote them but they find it difficult."

From Peter Kyalo: "Bringing SCC Members Closer:" Congratulations to the congregation of Kinyambu Parish in Machakos Diocese for their active involvement in SCC Meetings. With every SCC made smaller to accommodate four homesteads, people are now able to meet at each homestead on a shorter rotation cycle and each member is more aware of the welfare of the other members. There are now more SCCs and the interactions are now closer. Working this way, the sick shall never be forgotten and the needy are easily identified. Now this reminds us vote and redefine SCCs more in our poll
<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>

From a SCC animator in Cairo, Egypt: "I thank you for your excellent service of SCCs networking. Personally I have been in Sudan and there the Small Christian Communities were well very committed. Since almost 10 years I am in Cairo with the Sudanese people (schools, pastoral commitments). By now I am inspiring my confreres and the different communities of Sudanese people to renew the Small Christian Communities. I thank you from my heart for your commitments. As soon I could get some possibilities, I'll try to order some communications media for the Small Christian Communities."

From Cyprian Okuye Atar in Torit, South Sudan:

"Find here is pictorial report on the progress of the SCCs formation in the Catholic Diocese of Torit, South Sudan.

Just to recapitulate the events:

- (1) AMECEA Pastoral Department workshop held in Nairobi from 23 to 27 June 2014.
- (2) Awareness creation through all Sunday announcements in the two Catholic Parishes of Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral and Our Lady of the Assumption Catholic Church in Torit.
- (3) Meeting of the Catholic Priests and Brothers convened by the Vicar General, Fr. Arcangelo Lokoro on 16 July 2014. A Plan of Action was adopted that included a training.
- (4) The first training commenced on 1 to 15 August 2014.
- (5) The graduation of the first 115 members and Animators of Small Christian Communities took place on Sunday, 17 August 2014 officiated by Msgr. Thomas Oliha Attiaya, A.J. Apostolic Administrator. Catholic Diocese of Torit.

We are planning the Second Training.

We would like to thank all of you for the training my wife and myself had in Nairobi from 23 to 27 June 2014 that was the basis for the initiation of this program in the Diocese of Torit. We are also planning to extend this training to all the parishes of the Diocese.

Once more as we remember with great appreciation the time in Nairobi. We would like to request your continued prayers for this mission to reach all the faithful in the Diocese and the Catholic Church in South Sudan."

“Thirteen members of St. Kizito SCC in St. Austin's Parish, Nairobi (three lay leaders from Waruku – Jackline Oduor, Catherine Muhatia and Dominic Ayienda -- and ten Franciscan Religious Sisters of the Immaculate Novices from the Amani na Wema ["Peace and Goodness"] Home) participated today, Saturday, 6 September, 2014, in the fundraising walk for the Beatification Process of the Servant of God (SOG) Maurice Cardinal Otunga at Holy Family Basilica in Nairobi, Kenya.”

Three comments followed: “It is great to see this commitment from our SCC.” “Faith with action. It is good to lead by example.” “The efforts and commitments will receive divine rewards.”

“The Tanzania Episcopal Conference (TEC) in collaboration with the Missio Aachen (Germany) organized a theological symposium to discuss the pastoral challenges and opportunities of evangelization in Tanzania at Mbagala Spiritual Centre in Dar es Salaam from 8-9 September, 2014. Bishop Almachius Rweyongeza of Kayanga Diocese emphasized that the Catholic Church has to invest in families and Small Christian Communities. This is because without strong families the Catholic Church is unlikely to be a One, Holy and Apostolic.”

NOTE: This SCCs Facebook Page can be an opportunity to exchange reflections on the previous Sunday’s Gospel as seen in this example:

“How did ‘you’ interpret and apply yesterday (Sunday, 21 September, 2015)'s Gospel story of the “Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard” (Matthew 20:1-16). I will never read this story in the same way again after hearing a lay woman during a Shared Homily in Morristown, New Jersey, USA say: ‘Reminds me of the poor immigrant workers (mainly Spanish-speaking) standing near the train station in Morristown, New Jersey in the morning waiting for someone (like from a Construction Company) to hire them for a day laborer job. Passing by the train station in the middle of the day I saw some of these same workers still waiting to be hired.’

“I am reminded of driving on James Gichuru Road in Nairobi, Kenya around 7 a.m. and passing hundreds of men (called "kibarua" or casual workers) waiting for someone (like a truck from a Road Construction Company) to pick them up and carry them to a construction site. Some of these casual workers wait the whole day hoping to get a day laborer job.”

**“PRAISE AND GLORY BE TO YOU LORD JESUS CHRIST,
AMEEEEEEEEEEN!!”**

“We congratulate Father Nicholas Segeja, a diocesan priest of Mwanza Archdiocese, Tanzania and the Head of the Pastoral Theology Department at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) in Nairobi, Kenya for his appointment by Pope Francis as a member of International Theological Commission. Father Segeja is a big promoter of SCCs and has written extensively on SCCs’ theology and practice. See the references to his writings in our free, online Ebook at: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/ebooks/47-ebooks-.html>”

Sunday, 28 September, 2004 is a worldwide day of prayer for the World Synod of Bishops on the “Family and Marriage” that starts in Rome on 5 October. Part of the prayer provided by Pope Francis says:

“Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families too
may be places of communion and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel
and Small Domestic Churches.”

From Father Vincent Mwakhwawa in Malawi: "Those interested to learn and be reminded about Missionary Month (October) and Mission Sunday -- 19 October (*Chibalalitso cha Mpingo*) -- tune into Radio Maria Malawi. There will be some programs on Missionary Month and Mission Sunday in the coming days of October on Radio Maria Malawi. As you may be aware, from Sunday, 28 September we will start Mission Sunday animation/ reflections in parishes, outstations, Small Christian Communities (*Miphakati*) and in our families."

“In my homily and other SCCs gatherings this weekend I am using this mission-related story: ‘After giving a group of second grade children a complete tour and explanation of the inside of a church (altar, tabernacle, statues, Stations of the Cross, Baptismal font, pews, etc.) Bishop Kevin Dowling of Rustenburg, South Africa asked: ‘What is the most important thing in this church?’ After some silence, a little girl raised her hand and said, ‘The exit sign.’ Taken aback, the bishop asked her to explain. She replied, ‘Well, aren’t we supposed to take what we learn in church out into the world?’”

“Praying the World Mission Rosary (where each decade has colored beads that represent the continents of the world: White for Europe, Yellow for Asia, Blue for Oceania, Red for the Americas and Green for Africa) in our SCCs is a concrete way of celebrating October as both ‘Missionary Month’ and the ‘Month of the Rosary.’”

From Renata Dalmath in Bukoba, Tanzania: “I and members of my parish benefited from the Lumko Course b'se now we have Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs). We meet once per week on Sunday at 9 p.m. in my YSCC. God is good. Many thanks to my Bishop M. Kilaini and Mwanajumuiya Fr. Joe Healey whose care and sponsorship helped me to join the Lumko Course to get knowledge of pastoral and theological issues in SCCs. I was educated and I educate others. God bless those who sponsored me.”

From Bishop Fritz Lobinger in South Africa: "It was with great joy that I received your letter, your report, and your photos of the 2014 Lumko East Africa Course on Nairobi, Kenya. Your lines shows me that the Church in East Africa is firmly on the path of community building, exactly following the path on which the Early Church has put us. You have left your parishes and communities for several weeks in order to learn more about ways of becoming a community in Christ, as brothers and sisters.

What would make my joy even greater would be to see how some of you are developing new materials for further developing this aim of becoming a Community Church. Times are moving on and we have to move on with them. The present Lumko materials were developed and designed a few decades ago and we have to move beyond them. I pray and hope that this will happen. In two weeks’ time I will reach the age of 86 years and it is time that young talents are now building on the things that were designed long ago. I pray and hope that some of you will take this step.”

The Catholic Diocese of Ifakara, Tanzania is observing the "Year of Catechesis" that started on 19 March, 2014 and will end on 19 March, 2015 when they will be celebrating the

3rd Anniversary of the diocese. Bishop Salutaris Melchior Libena said that the "Year of Catechesis" basically entails intensive catechism throughout the diocese on various levels. "All Christians are encouraged to attend various sessions regardless of whether they have received the training on the catechism before or not. The sessions are carried out in the Small Christian Communities and on other parish levels."

From layman Abel Muse in Ethiopia: "The AMECEA Laity Meeting in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania was very good. Many have come up with strong recommendations of keeping up Small Christian Communities (SCCs) where they are active and establishing them in the countries where they are not active and not existing. If SCCs would be there, families would have been strengthened. SCCs are the basis for building up the Catholic Church. In Ethiopia we too have to work actively on SCCs."

"Today we gathered for our weekly St. Isidore of Seville International Online Skype SCC Gathering. Although we face challenges around the world within our own lives as well as with our internet connectivity, we were lucky enough to take a photograph with five of our members present, representing 3 different continents: Africa, Europe and North America."

"Yesterday in the African Culture Classes at Notre Dame Prep in Baltimore, MD, USA we discussed setting up YSCC Twinning or YSCC Partnership between schools in USA and schools in Kenya. We agreed the best method would be through Skype calls."

"At the end of this Year 2014 please give a short evaluation (strengths and weaknesses) of the development of our SCCs in Eastern Africa:

- Sylvester Ben Chasweka: "As much as there is growth of youth involvement in SCCs, youth involvement still leaves a lot to be desired. The kids are often times left out. I have observed that some SCCs are too big to be truly local and foster a truly personal encounter. All in all, SCCs are on the move in the right direction in Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi."
- Joseph G. Healey: "One strength was the growth of our Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) in Eastern Africa. One weakness was that many Catholics cannot receive communion because they have not had their marriages sacramentalized (they have not been married in the Catholic Church)."

"I am the chairman of St. Veronica Small Community in St. Catherine Catholic Church in Nyahururu Diocese. I am happy to present the humble request of a young girl who has been ailing for quite some time and needs an operation on the growth on her neck. The total bill is 68,900/=. Out of this St. Veronica SCC has contributed 18,500/=. the parish priest raised 17,000/=. the parish assistant gave 5,000/=. The total contributions in our treasury are 40,500/= The balance required to save the life of this helpless young girl is 28,400/="

Bishop Paul Kariuki of Embu Diocese, Kenya: "I have been able to visit every Small Christian Community in this diocese. I know exactly where they are, what they are doing, what is happening there. I am in touch with the reality on the ground."

As SCC members celebrate the Feast of the Baptism of Jesus Christ let us reflect on Pope Francis' challenge in "The Joy of the Gospel:"

In virtue of their Baptism all members of the People of God have become missionary disciples. All the baptized, whatever their position in the

Church or their level of instruction in the faith, are agents of evangelization, and it would be insufficient to envisage a plan of evangelization to be carried out by professionals while the rest of the faithful would simply be passive recipients. The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized. Every Christian is challenged, here and now, to be actively engaged in evangelization.

Father John Lange, MM reports on the "Jumuiya" (Swahili for "SCC") Masses in Mwanhuzi Town in Shinyanga Diocese, Tanzania. About 20 people participate. A nice meal usually follows. These SCC masses usually occur on the Feast of the Patron/Patroness Saint, at Harvest Time and at the end of Lent.

From Chishimba Chishimba in Zambia: "Today 60 youth leaders from various parishes in Lusaka gathered at Pope Square for a leadership work and one of the topics discussed was SCCs. It was so interesting to see the passion in these leaders for SCCs. They all want to have Youth SCCs where they can be free to discuss their own issues unlike when they combine with adults. One major concern brought out was that youth still don't understand the importance of attending SCC, of what help it is to them especially in this generation where everyone is struggling for "identity." I have another workshop with a different group next Saturday."

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

From John Musonda: "If a SCC is a communion of families how are our SCCs involved in family pastoral ministries. Three years ago I witnessed something that I had never seen in my life. In our youth group at our Salesian Parish in Hwange, Zimbabwe we celebrated three marriages from within the youth group within the period of one year. Amazing! We can read from Pope Francis: to fix the crisis in this world is a call to return to family."

Pope Francis' prayer intention for evangelization in February, 2015 is: "That married people who are separated may find welcome and support in the Christian community." What are our SCCs doing to reach out to these people? Some posts:

- Alfred Magero: "Move along with them as they strive to attain fullness of Christ in their lives. Move along with them means that we don't discriminate against them. We share the life challenges together with them and tackle issues faith and spiritual in best way possible."
- SCCs Website Moderator: Another word for "move along with" them is to "accompany" them that is used frequently by Pope Francis who says in No. 169 of *The Joy of the Gospel*: "The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this "art of accompaniment" which teaches us to remove our sandals

before the sacred ground of the other (cf. *Exodus* 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life."

- Murori Lawrence: "I gathered 180 SCC leaders in the deanery to talk about it and it was received with great appreciation. Today about 150 leaders from Laare parish in Meru are meeting to deliberate on their SCCs' progress."
- Kim Patrick Maxmilian: "Kindly send me a copy of the 13 steps of conducting a Small Christian Community gathering."
- Peter Kyalo: "I have never heard of this topic in the many SCC meetings that I have attended. I think all SCCs need to take this intention seriously and try reach out to them."
- Joseph Healey: "Think of one specific married couple whom you know who are separated and pray for, and with, them."

From Peter Kyalo: "Today I was invited to attend a class at Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya where we discussed Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs). I gave a presentation on the activities of YSCCs at Kenyatta University Catholic Community. We also had a report from Dandora Parish in Nairobi which was represented by three youth. It is important that the Catholic Church now recognizes the role of YSCCs and promotes the establishment of the same in all Catholic schools and institutions in the world."

"During the Commission for Missions of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB)'s Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the Watakatifu Wote (All Saints) Pastoral Centre, Ngong Diocese we discussed the close links between Pontifical Missionary Childhood (PMC) and SCCs in Kenya. Hopefully some of the fruit of our reflections will get into the answers to the questionnaire on "Family and Marriage" for the October, 2015 Synod of Bishops."

"The new Cardinal of Ethiopia, Berhaneyesus Souraphiel who is also the Chairman of AMECEA, spoke to Vatican Radio's English Service for Africa. He said that the AMECEA pastoral program of Small Christian Communities should be used to deepen African family values."

Please share specific, concrete examples of how your SCC is involved in and participating in Lent this year 2015:

- From KUCC Youth Small Christian Community (YSCC) Facebook Page: "Lord, it feels like we are embarking on a Lenten journey together, you and I. The beautiful words in the today's prayer talk about the "quiet remembrance of our need for redemption."
- Our four SCCs in our SCCs Class at Tangaza, Nairobi answered the question in the "2015 Kenya Lenten Campaign" booklet: "What can we do as family or Small Christian Community to promote Christian values in our families?"
- From Michael Orondo: "We in St. Kizito SCC in Nairobi started our Lenten reflections yesterday. Since we prepare the Gospel of the following Sunday we read Week Two (2nd Sunday of Lent) in the "2015 Kenya Lenten Campaign" booklet on the theme on "Security."
- Members of St. Felicity SCC at Kahawa West, Nairobi shared on the Second Week of Lent. Very interactive sharing. To the question "What are you doing as an individual or Small Christian Community to improve security in the society? The members

stressed the need to continue to know each others' neighbors (having amicable relationships with them). Also to be closer to their children as they enter the teenage stage so that they may not engage in illicit practices that brings anxiety to the neighborhood.

- "9 Ideas to Celebrate Easter with Your Small Group" is an excellent and practical online resource for your SCC from the [SmallGroups.com](http://www.smallgroups.com) Website at: <http://www.smallgroups.com/.../9-ideas-to-celebrate...>
- From Lusaka, Zambia: "Each of our Small Christian Community in my parish, (The Cathedral of the Child Jesus, Pope Square, Lusaka, Zambia) has been given a Friday to lead in the Way of the Cross during this Lenten Period. May God guide us through."
- "On Friday, 3 April 2015 the Way of the Cross came to an end with the Good Friday Liturgy at our parish St. Austin's Church near Lavington, Nairobi at around 4:30 p.m. Earlier in the morning we started in a very unique way from Waruku towards St. Austin's. As St. Kizito SCC members we walked as normal but at the first stations we were joined by other Small Christian Communities from Waruku, i.e. St. Charles Lwanga, St. Bakhita, St. Petro Mwamba and St. John from Lavington respectively. Also we were joined by three priests, i.e. Mwanajumuiya Padri Joe Healey and then Fr. George Wambua the parish priest and Fr. Steve Kariuki the assistant priest who started with St. John SCC from Lavington side. Out of all these SCCs St. Kizito led three quarters of the station events, i.e. Sammy Ngunga and Michael Orondo facilitating the prayers and helped others to follow easily. Finally the first Way of the Cross through the neighborhood came to an end at around 12:30 p.m. to lead into the main one at the parish church that started around 1.15 p.m. So I take this opportunity to thank all those who participated and wish them happy Easter Season."

"I'm Brother Patrick, a theology student at Tangaza University College. I do my pastoral work by animating 20 Small Christian Communities in Our Lady of Mt. Carmel and St. Charles Lwanga Parish in Nairobi. I usually visit a different SCC on a rotational basis each Sunday. The program I'm taking to all these SCCs currently is showing the DVD entitled *The Church in the Neighborhood* that I got at our Small Christian Community Class with Fr. Joseph Healey. I always go with a video projector as I visit all these SCCs in their homes and play the DVD after which I invite all the participants to share what they have seen, what they have heard being said by the presenters, what they have learnt, the challenges they have gotten as a SCC and what they are to do to implement all this in their SCCs. So far I have shown the DVD seven times."

"As part of the Missio, Aachen Team three of us visited St. Theresa of the Child Jesus SCC in Karinde Outstation of Queen of Heaven Parish, Karen, Kenya on Sunday, 8 March, 2013. 17 participants (13 women, four men). As a 'first' we read the Gospel in four languages: Swahili, Gikuyu, English and German. The success of the SCCs in Queen of Heaven Parish is a result of: one, the pastoral vision of the pastor and the parish team; two, flexibility in adapting to changing social, economic, political, cultural and religious trends in Kenya ; and three, commitment of the Catholic laity to this model of church."

A Study Guide has been published in Kenya on *Ad Gentes*. One of the Pastoral Theological Reflection (PTR) questions is: "*Ad Gentes* emphasizes that through Baptism all Christians are called to be missionaries and evangelizers. 99% of the members of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are lay people. How are they promoting missionary awareness and sharing their faith with others?" Please give your answers and your SCC's answers here.

- By holding prayers together and visiting members in their homes and encouraging them to read the *Bible* and pray regularly.
- Encouraging people in the neighborhood who are not Catholics to join the RCIA (the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults or the adult catechumenate) and go through the steps until being baptized.
- Encouraging those who have lost hope and helping the needy/the wounded so they feel loved also.
- Our free online Ebook has several sections on the importance of lay people in Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and how they can be missionaries and evangelists. One choice in our poll on "The best part of my Small Christian Community is:..." "community of missionary disciples."
- The April, 2015 issue of *The Seed* Magazine says that this Study Guide helps us to reflect on missionary activity and it is enriched with questions for sharing in small groups or in Small Christian Communities.

"I am David Angelo Ngombu from Sierra Leone. I am interested in SCCs in African countries and especially Sierra Leone. I am the Chairman of the Our Lady of Perpetual Help SCC in the St. Theresa's Catholic Church, New Gerihun Road in Bo City, Southern Region, Sierra Leone, West Africa. It is one of the 13 SCCs in my parish. I have also served as a Councillor of the Parish Pastoral Council (PPC).

There are many SCCs attached to the various parishes in Bo Diocese. There are several problems faced by these SCCs ranging from knowledge, functions and importance to administration. I have decided to prepare a two-day workshop inviting representatives from the groups to train them on the above mentioned issues. Please supply me with the necessary facts of SCCs that will be transmitted to the participants in the workshop."

"Our sister and friend Ms. Mary Nives Kizito died in Nairobi, Kenya on Saturday, 21 March, 2015 at 12 Noon. A Memorial Mass will be celebrated at 7 p.m. on Tuesday, 24 March in St. Francis of Assisi SCC at her house in Ngumo Estate. She was a faithful member of this SCC. Prayers please."

"On Easter Sunday, 5 April, 2015 we had the final match in our 'Playing for Peace' football (soccer) tournament in Elburgon, Molo Subcounty, Nakuru County in the Rift Valley in Kenya. The tournament is an effort to restore peace in the area that was among the most affected in 2007/08 post-election violence. Please pray that the games may go well, and that this will lead to a peaceful co-existence among the different ethnic groups in the area. May Kenyan youth of different ethnic groups witness to peace, equality and fair play through football and other sports. May SCCs support this initiative."

"At 2:30 p.m. on Easter Sunday, 5 April, 2015 we joined the SCC members in the eight SCCs in St. Brigid Outstation in St. Timothy Parish to watch the final match in our 'Playing for Peace' football (soccer) tournament in Elburgon, Molo Subcounty, Nakuru County in the Rift Valley in Kenya. The match was between Lelechwet FC (mainly Kalenjin ethnic group players) and Intercity (mainly Kikuyu ethnic group players). Hopefully the results will bring harmony and peace among these young Kenyans."

"The match called the *Kombe la Amani* (Cup of Peace) was played on the football pitch of Michinda Secondary School. The final score was Intercity 4 and Lelechwet 0. After

the game the players shook hands and participated in a Kalenjin ethnic group dance of peace and reconciliation with the sharing of specially prepared milk in a gourd. There was a good spirit of joy and friendliness. The local government chief said the ceremony brought harmony among all the ethnic groups. Such sports events keep the Kenya youth busy and off the streets and thus they avoid the risk of crime and other bad activities. The winners received a cup inscribed with the words 'Peace Champions.'

"Please pray for the Holy Spirit to guide the team that is meeting at the JJ McCarthy Centre, on Riverside Drive, Nairobi to consolidate the responses received so far for the *Lineamenta* for the October, 2015 Synod of Bishops. The eight team members include Kenyan Bishop James Maria Wainaina of Murang'a Diocese (who together with Cardinal John Njue will represent Kenya at the synod in Rome), one priest, two religious sisters, one married laywomen, two married laymen and one single man. The responses include many references to SCCs."

"It has been said that we should preach with the *Bible* in one hand and the newspaper in the other hand. This is based on the famous quotation of Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth: Take your *Bible* and take your newspaper, and read both. But interpret newspapers from your *Bible*.' We can update this to say: We should preach with one eye on the *Bible* and the other eye on the BBC World News that can be found on the radio, TV and the internet that includes video clips. The SCCs Website has links to the BBC RSS FEEDS for African News. On the internet version of the BBC World News today I saw a powerful video on the 140 survivors of the shipwreck in which about 400 migrants are feared to have died off Libya this week. It was caused by excitement at the sight of rescuers."

"Youth Family Life Seminar at Dandora Holy Cross Nursery Hall in Nairobi starting at 9 a.m. on Sunday, 19 April, 2015. This forum has been organized by family life ministries for the youth to get teachings about marriage as a sacrament, the essence of marriage, courtship, how to deal with break ups and many more topics so don't dare miss! Charges are 100 Kenyan Shillings only. The Youth SCCs are involved because they are the ones who form the Youth Group and choose the topics to be discussed. This seminar connects nicely with the process, consultation and search for pastoral solutions for the October, 2015 Synod of Bishops on Family and Marriage."

"The Fresh Expressions initiative (with a team and website based in Coventry, England) encourages new forms and styles of church for a fast changing world. It works with Christians from a variety of denominations and traditions. The Fresh Expressions Website and Monthly Newsletter (<http://www.freshexpressions.org.uk>) has a creative exchange of ideas on new expressions or forms or styles of being and becoming church. Many are a SCCs model of church."

America – The National Catholic Review published on 17 April, 2015 a Blog entitled: "Kenya and the Survey for the Synod on the Family" <http://www.americamagazine.org/.../kenya-and-survey-synod-fam...> Besides the Direct Link above it can be found on the *America* Website (<http://www.americamagazine.org>) under "Dispatches: A Blog on National and International Affairs." There are several references to SCCs.

Intentional Eucharistic Communities (IECs) in the United States will be gathering in June in St. Paul, Minnesota to share ideas and techniques and prayer. Please join us! www.intentionaleucharistic.org

Xavier Thelakkatt's weekly Homily Bog: "Usually I don't share the tricks of the trade" said Fr. Dennis. He was a highly successful pastor in his parish community. He has been ministering to a community of nearly three thousand faithful for quite a few years. I knew he was highly respected and deeply loved. I asked what made him so successful. His response was rather intriguing. As Fr. Dennis continued, he asserted, "The real trick is not to treat it as a trade." As a pastor he was not doing a job or working for his pay. "The pastor's responsibility is ministry and it requires undivided attention and wholehearted commitment."

The word "pastor" is a modern equivalent for "shepherd." Jesus referred to himself as "the good shepherd" (*John* 10:11). The hallmark of a good shepherd is his total commitment, to the extent of laying down his life for the sheep (*John* 10:12). A hired hand need not have that kind of loyalty and dedication for the cause of the sheep, however, every Christian is called to be a shepherd or a pastor to those entrusted to his/her care. "Feed my sheep" is Jesus' commandment (*John* 21:15-17), and it is thrice repeated in the Gospel. For a Christian pastor there is no better shepherding technique than wholehearted commitment."

"Congrats to the St. Agatha Joy Women's Tailoring and Training Group of St. Kizito SCC in Nairobi, Kenya for preparing a new shipment of African shirts, dresses, purses and bags to be sold in the USA. The core team models different ethnic groups working together. There are two Luhya women, one Kamba woman, one Taita woman and a Kikuyu financial advisor."

"SCCs are a new model of church and a new way of being church today. SCCs are not a movement in the church. Spiritually they are the church on the move. That is why we are in Tororo, Uganda today for this SCCs Workshop."

Now available as a 46-page booklet and soon to be posted online:

Family and Marriage in Kenya Today: Pastoral Guidelines for a Process of Discussion and Action (based on the Relatio Synodi 2015 and the "Results of the Consultation in Kenya on the 46 Questions in the Lineamenta on 'The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World'"). There are 23 references to SCCs in this booklet.

"Celebrating an Extended Family Home Mass in Baltimore, MD, USA reminds us of the House Churches in the 1st Century AD. We had about 30 people in what I call the Sheehan House Church. The little children were actively involved and even acted out the Ascension story. The homily was on members of the extended family celebrating the seven sacraments. Part of the weekend was the baptism of James Miller Sheehan. The link to the ceremony in the Church of the Nativity on Saturday, 16 May is: <https://www.facebook.com/emi.../videos/10152862483707055/...>

From Mwangi Kamau in Boston, Massachusetts, USA: "I belong to a group in Boston, Massachusetts that calls itself the KENYA CATHOLIC COMMUNITY AND FRIENDS. We are struggling to establish Jumuiyas. I want to request for any assistance that can help us grow in capacity and knowledge. Like "Utaratibu wa Jumuiya" or "Mwongozo wa Jumuiya."

Our St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC reflected on the Gospel from Mark 14 for Sunday, 7 June, 2015: "Feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ." We used the quote of Pope Francis in No. 47 of *The Joy of the Gospel*: "The Eucharist, although

it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.”

At the recent Workshop on “Building Christian Fellowship in Institutions of Learning through SCCs” at the Donum Dei Retreat Centre, Karen, Nairobi, Kenya, 21 to 24 May, 2015 the 28 participants were introduced to the "Let's Do It! World" Website (<http://www.letsdoitworld.org>) to show an example of people-centered advocacy. In light of the coming papal encyclical *Laudato Si* ("Be Praised") -- "On the Care of Our Common Home" may our SCCs start reflecting on ecology and environmental issues. I recall the different ecology/environmental campaigns in St. Kizito, SCC Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya during Lent especially tree planting and garbage and waste/refuse collection in the neighborhood. These are documented in our free online Ebook at: http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../Build_new.pdf

In light of the new papal encyclical *Laudato Si* ("Be Praised") -- "On the care of our common home" may our SCCs start reflecting on ecology and environmental issues. Our free online Ebook "Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa" (<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../47-ebooks-.html>) has 8 references to "ecology" and 43 references to "environment."

From Ben Wanjala: “During the priesthood and brotherhood Jubilee Celebrations at Maryknoll, New York USA on Sunday 28 June 2015 visitors bought the women’s African handbags and other gifts made by the St. Agatha Joy Women’s Tailoring and Training Group in St. Kizito SCC in Nairobi, Kenya. Congratulations St. Agatha Joy Women's Tailoring and Training Group! Hoyeee!”

Excellent article on SCCs: Kristina Cooper, “From the Cell to the World,” *Tablet*, Vol. 269, No. 9107 (4 July, 2015), p. 18. The article recommends: “Consider joining a PEC or some other kind of Small Christian Community group to share your faith.” On the *Tablet* Website, retrieved on 4 July, 2015, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/downloadpdf/040715issue.pdf>

We sent books on SCCs in Eastern Africa to the Catholic Student Center, Rice University, Houston, Texas, USA. The Director replied: "It is so important to give students an opportunity to see and learn about the many ways we are Christians all over the world and eventually know that 'there is just one of us.' Thank you for your contribution to the process."

The powerful personal witness of Kenyan laywoman Pamela Adinda:

"The aspect of “solidarity” in the Small Christian Community is something that I recently experienced firsthand. At St. Paul's University Chapel in Nairobi, Kenya that is my parish, our Small Christian Communities are the various groups in the parish in which parishioners are obliged to join. There are about 18 groups or SCCs including CWA, Community Choir Group, Friends of St. Paul’s Group, St. Paul Prayer Group, Men of St. Paul Group, Lectors, Altar Society, PMS, St. Paul Youth Group, Self Help Group, Eucharistic Members Group, Bible Study Group, Mass Servers, Liturgical Committee Group, CJPC Group, Renewal Group, Family Life Group and Ushers and Helpers Group.

I belong to the Lectors SCC. Three weeks ago my two babies were admitted at Gertrude’s Children Hospital when both had throat infections. We stayed in the hospital for six days and trust me the SOLIDARITY that I got from my Small Christian Community, the Lectors Group of St. Paul, was amazing. Each day SCC members called, texted, and used all

sorts of social media to keep in touch with me. We prayed together over the phone and they encouraged me a lot. I felt like I really belonged and that was very important to me. The Lectors SCC members journeyed with me throughout the time my children were admitted and they continued supporting me even after we left the hospital. That's why SOLIDARITY in the Small Christian Community is very important to me."

From Alphonse Omolo and others: "Our Skype SCC *Bible* Reflection session is live as we speak -- connecting SCC members in Germany, Kenya and USA. Belza Ramos in Texas, Simon Kwabena Dankyi in Germany, Joseph G. Healey in Nairobi and myself visiting Nairobi! We had a nice time sharing the Scripture text for coming Sunday, more especially the discussion around Eucharistic Hunger for divorced and remarried couples -- the motivation towards finding a creative pastoral solution while treating each case as special. Also, the lessons from the Word of God concerning food wastage and how to care for, and nurture the resources that are available to us. Very inspirational!!!"

From Johnte Ndiawo: "You just came back from work and as you enter your house you see rats eating your vital documents:

The 1st rat is eating your Degree/College certificate.
 The 2nd is eating your Marriage certificate.
 The 3rd rat is eating the title deeds for your house.
 The 4th rat is eating your passport with business visa for a multi-billion project.
 The 5th rat is eating your *Bible*.

Please be honest with your reply.....
 Which rat will you kill first? 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th or 5th...??? And why?"

SECAM launched the continent-wide African Year of Reconciliation (AYR) in Accra, Ghana on 29 July, 2015 that will run until 29 July, 2016. The theme chosen for this opening 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 Challenge*, No. 21) anchored in truth (*Africa's Challenge*, No. 20)? Can each SCC choose one concrete practical action of reconciliation on the local level?

Some suggested responses:

From Mwanajumuiya Joe Healey: "I 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.

From Mwanajumuiya Rose Musimba: "It is helpful to emphasize the "hali halisi" (Swahili for the local reality or the facts on the ground) in our reconciliation actions."

From Mwanajumuiya John Siyumbu. "A modest workshop on some common elements of faith found in both Christianity and Islam followed by an informal get-together

session in an SCC would be a good way of commemorating the African Year of Reconciliation. We need both the unity workshop idea and the social interaction.”

From SCC members in Nairobi: “In visiting our Muslim friends in the neighborhood, even next door, we find that the Christian and Muslim children playing together is the best icebreaker. It comes naturally to them. The children don’t see the problems, the differences.”

“During our Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Workshop in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso from 5 – 10 August, 2015 we three delegates from Eastern Africa (AMECEA Region) are learning a lot about West Africa. For example, the Catholic Church in Burkina Faso has 15 dioceses, 177 parishes with CCBs and 8,162 CCBs (in French *Communautés Chrétiennes de Base*).”

Dear Trainers of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa.

Greetings to you. I am the Chairman of St. Kizito SCC, Parish Our Lady Consolata in the Catholic Diocese of Maralal. We are glad to learn of the Small Christian Community Website. Thank you for the good work. We have constructed a library at our church which is still lacking roofing materials, doors and internal fixtures, i.e. chairs and reading tables. All this would cost us Shs 90,500/=

So far we raised as follows.

St. Kizito SCC 22,500/=
 Parish of Our Lady of Consolata 20,000/=
 Other Small Christian Communities 20,000/=
 Total Sum raised 62,500/=
 Request 28,000/=

Your consideration to enable us complete this library will be highly appreciated.

Yours in Christ's Love
 Eickson Erickson Lokwe

From Ben Wanjala: “Members of St. Josephine Bakhita SCC in Waruku, Nairobi Kenya serve food to Christians after family day celebrations at St. Austin’s Catholic Church in Lavington, Nairobi, Kenya on 08/08/2015.”

From Gordon Okumu: “PREPARATION FOR THE PHILADELPHIA, USA TRIP IN SEPTEMBER. Preparation for the World Meeting of Families in Philadelphia has started in earnest as the group of 19 participants representing part of the Kenyan delegation met at the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) main boardroom to deliberate upon the forthcoming trip to the USA. The meeting started with thanksgiving prayers for those whose visa application was successful and prayer for strength and consolation for those whose application wasn’t successful. Members shared experiences they had during the visa interview. It came out clear that though we were all attending the same interview, everyone was asked a different question. Other than the most obvious question of: ‘Will you come back to Kenya after your visit to the USA, the consular section was more concerned on why people had to travel to the US to attend the meeting rather than watching live coverage of the event on television from home. Different answers were given to this question but thank God, 19 out of 29 applicants who had applied through KCCB got their visas approved. The meeting had different agendas and several agreements were reached upon including the Kenyan Delegation meeting with John Cardinal Njue, Rt. Rev. Salesius Mugambi, Fr. Daniel Rono, and Kenyan students in the USA who will be working at the conference in the afternoon of

25 September. It was also agreed that members should try and attend to local parishes while in Philadelphia and ask their hosts if they are members of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and if possible attend the Small Christian Communities with them and share their experiences with communities back here at home. On issues of the travel day the group coordinator reminded members to ensure that their travel documents are in good shape and other required documents prepared and carried at all times. Individuals are also to download the Conference Program from the World Meeting of Families Website for proper planning. On issues of branding Team Kenya, members agreed that the Family Life Office prints T – SHIRTS, CAPS & SCARVES to wear and as give away gifts, but members will purchase these items according to their order. Gordon was mandated to design the said products for printing. Also, the Kenyan song during the Philadelphia event was agreed to be the famous *Nibaraka Kutoka Kwa Mungu*. About the travel insurance and airline to use, members were free to travel with any airline of their choice and purchase insurance for the length of their proposed stay as this was not a group requirement. However, members were advised to keep in touch with one another while in Philadelphia and share with the group coordinator their residential addresses while in Philadelphia for ease in communications. The meeting ended with prayers and congratulations messages from Fr. Rono the General Secretary of KCCB. God bless Kenya!”

“Prayer intention: For the return to good health of SCCs Coordinating Team Member Caroline Adam's husband who lives in Ohio, USA.”

“New projects include setting up a SCCs Networking Team Page and Blog on the SECAM Website and a SCCs Networking Library at the SECAM Secretariat in Accra, Ghana (both a physical library and a “virtual” online library). Similar libraries will be set up at the AMECEA Secretariat in Nairobi, Kenya.”

“Please indicate if you know any SCCs that are using the social media platform WhatsApp to communicate together. Thanks.” Some responses:

1. From Damana Fidelis Kpeenbata: “The Catholic students in Mzumbe and Mbeya University of Science and Technology in Tanzania have started Facebook Groups and Whatsapp Groups. Communication is very easy. We post church teachings and reflections.”
2. From Joseph Healey, MM: “We have started a WhatsApp Group called "African Small Christ Comm" for Eastern Africa. Please join and share your SCCs experiences.”
3. From Jacob Jeketule Soko: “St. Rita Small Christian Community in Christ the King Catholic Church, Embakasi, Nairobi, Kenya is using WhatsApp.”
4. From Deacon Sylvester Chimenge, MAfr: "St. Paul SCC in Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish, South B, Nairobi, Kenya effectively uses WhatsApp as a means of modern evangelization. Every day the secretary posts the readings and reflections of the day as well as the teachings of Pope Francis, Gospel songs and other religious teachings.”
5. From Julius Philip Nyandiga Ouma, CP: “The members of the YSCC of the Cooperative University of Kenya in Nairobi, Kenya have a WhatsApp Small

Community that discusses and debates controversial issues such as premarital sex, choosing a marriage partner and challenged doctrines in the Catholic Church.”

From Paul Baraza: “The Spec Training and Consultancy Centre is holding a Family Accompaniment workshop this weekend (Saturday and Sunday) in Karen, Nairobi, Kenya. We are using the Small Christian community as an entry point. We aim at promoting better upbringing of children by providing a forum for family heads and caretakers (househelpers) to share. Please keep us in your prayers.”

From Wellington Irungu:

“Dear AMECEASmall Christian Communities Training Team,

Greetings to you from St. Christopher Small Christian Community, St. Francis Parish Nyahururu Diocese, Kenya. We are humbly and passionately requesting you to help us meet the medical bill of a young girl Veronica Nyambura who is to undergo a Grouth Operation on her neck. The total sum of Kshs 82,500/= is needed.

The following are our contributions.

St. Christopher SCC 20,500/=

St. Francis Parish 16,000/=

Other seven SCCs 15,000/=

Total in treasury 51,500/=

Balance 31,000/=

We pray that may God provide a way through the Eastern African SCC Training Team to save a life by raising the balance.

United in prayers, with kind regards,

The Chairman, St. Christoper SCC.”

Receive greetings from St. Monica Small Christian Community, St. Paul Catholic Parish, Kericho Diocese. We are humbly requesting the AMECEASmall Christian Communities Training Team to kindly assist us with some financial support to save the life of Susan Yengo who was bitten by a snake in meeting her medical hospital bill. In total we need cash Kshs 98,600/= . So far this is our contributions.

St. Monica SCC 23,500/=

St. Paul Catholic Parish 18,000/=

Other SCCs contributions 14,000/=

Total amount in Treasury 55,500/=

Balanced to be raised 43,100/=

Any contribution given to us will be very highly appreciated

Thank you in advance

Yours sincerely in christ

The chairman St. Monica SCC

Mr. William Ruto.

“We members of St. Kizito SCC in Waruku, Nairobi congratulate Agnes Alitsi and her husband Ben Wanjala on the birth of twin boys. One is named Joseph. Hongera. Pongezi. Congratulations Mama twins. Two new members of our SCC! Our new name for Agnes is Mama Joseph. This is the Lord’s doing; it is marvelous to us.”

“During our online Skype SCC *Bible* Reflection today we quoted from one of the email commentaries on next Sunday’s Gospel (*Mark 8:27-35*): ‘When Jesus equated discipleship with the cross, he was not commanding fatalistic endurance of life’s pains and injustices. He was calling for a shocking identification with the lowest of the low in Rome’s empire: subversives, violent criminals and rebellious slaves. Jesus identified discipleship with contesting the status quo, not conforming to it.’ This viewpoint has interesting connections to Pope Francis’ emphasis on the wounded, the marginated and those on the peripheries of our human society.”

“South Sudan FA Hopes Football 'Can Stop the War'”: Football can help bring peace to war-torn South Sudan, the president of the country's FA believes. Chabur Goc Alei was speaking after the widespread celebrations that greeted a first competitive victory for the world's newest nation. On Saturday South Sudan, which became independent in 2011, beat this year's Africa Cup of Nations semi-finalists Equatorial Guinea 1-0 in Juba. "Through football, we can stop the war," Chabur told BBC Sport. SOUTH SUDAN FACTFILE Achieved independence in 2011. Became a FIFA member in 2012. Ranked 198 of 209 FIFA members. Nicknamed the 'Bright Star.' “In football, we are talking about a peaceful nation because we don't have tribes or political parties.” The victory for South Sudan, a FIFA member since 2012, came in a qualifier for the 2017 Nations Cup.

Today's First Reading (Epistle) from *Colossians 3:11*: "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all and in all" can be rewritten to say: "Here there is not Dinka and Nuer, government troops and rebels, South Sudanese, foreigner, Catholic, Protestant, rich, poor; but Christ is all and in all."

From Paul Baraza: “The Family Accompaniment Workshop finished well over the weekend organized by www.spectcc.net with eight families taking part and a total of 31 participants for the two days. We had family heads on Saturday and mainly caregivers/house helpers⁹²⁹ on Sunday. Topics discussed included child protection, working relations, work-family balance, positive discipline and orientation to First Aid. For example, a trainer in First Aid instructed a house helper on how to do first aid on a choking baby. Our entry point was Small Christian Communities. We aimed at promoting better upbringing of children by

⁹²⁹ The complexity of the English language can be found in the many approved spellings:

house help (can refer to one person or as a collective noun)

house helps

house helpers

house-help

house-helps

house-helpers

househelp

househelps

househelpers

Can also refer to female domestic servant; governess; nanny; child care nanny.

providing a forum for family heads and caregivers/house helpers to share their experiences. Thanks so much for your prayers.”

A parish priest in Hong Kong writes: “Yet it seems to me that it is vital for parents to support one another, to share stories and suggestions, to consult one another and pray for one another. Christian parents need to form support groups. In today’s competitive world, giving God one hour a week (Sunday Mass) is no longer enough.”

We answered: "This is exactly what we do in our Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church in Eastern Africa. We have a whole variety of weekly SCCs for Catholic parents:

- Regular SCC where both parents (husband and wife) try to participate in a SCC together. This models family participation for the children.
- Newly married couples.
- Young parents with children.
- Single mothers.
- Parents or grandparents form a SCC support group after a child/grandchild has left the Catholic faith and even become atheist or agnostic.
- Parents with children who have special needs (such as disabilities).

Information on all these SCCs can be found on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website and Facebook Page: www.smallchristiancommunities.org

From Sophia Chebet: “St. Cecilia Jumuyia of St. John the Evangelist Parish meets on Sundays at 3 p.m. at the Shrine compound in Langata, Nairobi, Kenya and after that we normally join the Benediction hour from 4 p.m. to 5 p.m. We share the joy and the strength we draw from being with Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament! We encourage all the member of SCC to create time to be with the Lord at least once a week in this special way!”

From Peter Mabiya Kwalya: “To the AMECEASmall Christian Communities Training Team. Peace. Congratulations for this Global Collaborative Website. We desire to write on this Small Christian Community Facebook Page. I am the Chairman of St. Charles Lwanga Small Christian Community in St. Andrew Catholic Parish, Tororo Catholic Archdiocese, Tororo, Uganda. We are appealing for assistance to enable one of our members to undergo a kidney transplant in India that is very expensive. We have contributed the following:

St. Andrew Catholic Parish-----	Ushs.3,300,000/=	Kshs.100,000/=
St. Charles Lwanga SCC-----	Ushs.1,000,000/=	Kshs.38,000/=
6 other SCCs -----	Ushs.660,000/=	Kshs.20,000/=
Other parishes -----	Ushs 2,000,000/=	Ksh. 65,000/=
Total collected-----	Ushs. 6,960,000/=	Kshs 223,000/=

The operation is estimated at a cost of Kshs. 470,000/= Any contribution that comes in our will be highly appreciated. Wishing you God's Special Blessings.”

“Belza Ramos, the USA Story Coordinator of our SCCs Website and the Lay Coordinator for SCCs in St. Brigid Parish in San Antonio, Texas, USA reports that on Saturday mornings she facilitates a meeting of the eight lectors for the four masses the

following Sunday (three English masses, one Spanish mass). They read, prepare, reflect on and deepen the scripture readings. Some of the lectors have already read the Gospel in their SCCs during the middle of the week. Let us hope that the priests and deacons of this parish join this weekly group to get some concrete pastoral ideas and applications for their Sunday homilies.”

From Emmanuel Nzenze Epie:

“Spiritual Renewal at Christ the King Parish, Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya: For the past one month the SCCs of Christ the King Parish have been experiencing a spiritual reawakening. The parish, through the coordination of the pastoral office have organized recollection days for all SCCs in the parish. The theme for the recollections is “*Kuishi imani yetu katika maisha yetu ya kila siku*” (“Living our faith in our daily lives”). The recollection days started on 23 August 2015 and are being facilitated by Deacon Emmanuel Nzenze, MHM, a Mill Hill Missionary deacon from Cameroon serving in the parish. The following SCCs have already had their recollection days: Shilanga Outstation 23/8/15; St. Andrew, St. Augustine, St. Bernadetta 13/9/15; St. Peter, St. Francis, St. Joseph Laini Saba: Main Parish Centre 20/9/15; St. Martin de Pores, St. Benedict, St. Charles Lwanga, St. Kizito. This Sunday 27/9/15 will be the turn for St. Dominic and St. Stephen of Shilanga.”

Bishop John Oballa Owaa of Ngong Diocese, Kenya has written a nice article, “Make Small Christian Communities Shine,” in the October, 2015 issue of the *Catholic Mirror*. Key points include:

1. SCCs seek how to put the Word of God into practice to witness to the Gospel of Christ.
2. Catholic Christians come together as families in the neighborhood.
3. SCC members reach out to the marginalized of the community and mediate conflicts.
4. A major challenge [problem] is that some people think that SCCs are avenues for *Harambee*.
5. To meet youth where they are, we could create Youth SCCs.

“In Houston Texas, USA I am visiting Spanish-speaking SCCs that are called *Pequeñas Comunidades de Fe* (PCFs) or in English Small Faith Communities (SFCs). Belza Ramos of our SCCs Global Collaborative Website Coordinating Team is advising me. We are studying how to develop SCCs among the migrants and the immigrants (two different groups of people) coming into Texas. Today I met a Hispanic couple who help to coordinate three SCCs in St. Cyril of Alexandrina Parish: Love is Our Mission, Disciples of Jesus Christ and Messengers of the Light. After the Jubilee 2000 small group-style Spiritual Renewal Program some Catholics decided to continue meeting in their small communities. It is interesting that these three Spanish-speaking Small Communities of Faith (SCFs) use both Face Time and Skype to connect with members living at a distance -- even one woman who lives in Bogota, Colombia.”

“From St. Brigid Catholic Church, San Antonio, Texas, USA:

Small Christian Communities:

Ecclesial communities meet in various homes at different times and are a source of renewed self-understanding and hope for the entire Church. Rooted in scripture and small in

size (6 to 12 persons), these Small Church Communities provide opportunities to reflect deeply on the Christian message and the call to respond in service to the Small Community itself as well as to the larger faith community and the universal church. Many of the Small Christian Communities study the Sunday readings together and share thoughts, fellowship and prepare for the upcoming Mass. SCC members may include persons who are single, married, families, or intergenerational. The members gather as a large community on special dates throughout the year. For more information, please contact Belza Ramos at (210) 415-1540.

On Saturday, 17 October, 2015 (4:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m.) and Sunday, 18 October, 2015 (7:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.) the parish will host its annual Ministry Fair. Parishioners will be able to join existing and new SCCs in either English or Spanish.”

“In his Homily on World Mission Sunday on 18 October, 2015 retired Bishop Frank Rodimer of Paterson Diocese, New Jersey, USA referred to the importance of happily married couples during the discussions at the Synod of Bishops in Rome on the theme “Family and Marriage” and told this true mission story:

We Wanted To Be Like Them

A striking story is told about one remote area in South Sudan. Expatriate missionaries, especially priests, Brothers and Sisters had labored there for many years with few visible results. Then expatriate lay missionaries -- married and single -- came to the area and soon many South Sudanese become Catholics.

A South Sudanese elder explained: "When we saw the priests and Sisters living separately and alone we didn't want to be like them. But when we saw Catholic families -- men, women and children -- living happily together, we wanted to be like them." In the family-oriented African society married missionary couples with children have a powerful and unique witness, presence and credibility.

Sources: Healey, Joseph, *African Stories for Preachers and Teachers*, Paulines Publications Africa, 2006, p. 40.

Healey, Joseph and Donald Sybertz (eds.), *Towards an African Narrative Theology*, (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996 and Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997, p. 353. Available as an Ebook on Amazon (for Kindle), Google and Barnes and Noble (for Nook).

The African experience has a lot to contribute to the meeting of the Synod of Bishops that is presently going on in Rome. May our SCCs continue to pray for its practical fruits.”

An important part of this SCCs Facebook Page is that it is a "Prayer Corner," that is, a person is welcome to post a request for prayers of any and every kind. I just received this prayer request from Bishop Antoine Kambanda, the delegate of Rwanda to the Synod of Bishops meeting on "Family and Marriage" in Rome. He writes: "Thanks. Please accompany us with prayer. +A. Kambanda." So SCCs members, please pray fervently for the Holy Spirit to guide and inspire the final two days of the synod in Rome.

The Maryknoll Sisters Congregation (Religious Community of Catholic Missionaries) is sponsoring an International Bazaar of Crafts and Homemade Items on Saturday, 24 October, 2015 at the Maryknoll Sisters Center, Maryknoll, New York, USA. A benefactor has bought and donated to the bazaar some African Batik Shirts, Dresses and Handbags made by the St. Agatha Joy Women's Tailoring Group in St. Kizito Small Christian Community (SCC) in Nairobi, Kenya. Sales in, and donations to, other International Craft Fairs and Events in Eastern USA will take place during the rest of this year and next year.

From Cynthia Kayla: "The training of Pastoral Coordinators on Small Christian Communities (SCCs) from all the dioceses of South Sudan has begun today 20 October, 2015 in earnest in Juba. In an informal sharing during breakfast, the participant from Yambio Diocese shared a heartbreaking story on how he had to pass through roadblocks mounted by different groups of rebels. At times he had to be taken through bushy paths in order to avoid any harm to his life. Thank God he got to Juba safely. Hmmm! Makes me wonder how we take peace for granted. Don't we?"

From Ketty Nemwa: "I am the youth who represented Tororo Archdiocese, Uganda at the LUMKO COURSE in Nairobi. Am writing to thank you with much pleasure for having given us an opportunity to be part of that wonderful course where we learnt among many things the pastoral use of the Bible which enlightened us more on how we can relate the Bible to our daily life, learnt more on the various stages of church growth where we also got light on the importance of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in our various churches, we learnt about the various gospel sharing methods, inculturation, and many more. The course ended well and I must say it was the best experience.

We arrived safely in Uganda and are now drawing plans on how we can start our mission in the archdiocese but so far we have organised together with the youth chaplain to conduct a training on Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) and this is starting next week on 5 November, 2015 with the diocesan executive."

From John Bosco Odongo: "WhatsApp groups are a means of evangelization in Small Christian Communities today. Currently I belong to about nine WhatsApp groups: Some of them are family groups and others are directly SCCs that I have lived and worked with and in most cases I facilitated their days of prayer and pilgrimages to the National Shrine of Mother Mary at Subukia within Kenya. They are really a new way of being church as the SCCs essentially are.

Thus WhatsApp groups are a new way of being Small Christian Communities. These groups pass on faith, open opportunities for people to share their sorrows and joys, developments, organize meetings, raise funds for church developments and support the poor among us, etc. This is where the Spirit is taking us today. The following are the WhatsApp groups that I belong to today: St. John the Baptist SCC, J.B and Family International, St. Kizito Catholic Youth, St. Anne SCC Tassia Group, The Kizitos, Depaulians, Royal Class, Tangaza Charismatic Group and St. Teresa Donor Club. Through these groups we share the Word of God every day of our lives. You can't miss the touchdown sharing, the evangelization programs, service and help to the poor, sick and elderly.

Yes, it is a new way of being the family of God. I love them. These days I am on sick leave, but I am as effective in evangelization as ever before right from my room. Hahahaha. I just reflect on a text of the gospel or when I receive any inspiring message from one group I transmit to the others as well. If there is need to create awareness about employment

opportunities, issues to do with health or anything going on in the society I just post to all the groups. I can't share all here for sure."

From Jennifer Mertens, "[10 Tips for College Freshmen: Staying Connected to Your Faith.](#)" *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, 5 November 5, 2015:

1. Catholic campus ministers may coordinate weekly prayer services or Small Faith Groups/Small Faith Communities.
2. Join a Small Faith Group or Intentional Small Community. It's a great way to meet other students interested in reflecting together and growing closer to God. Small groups can focus on any sort of topic such as Scripture or prayer, and they can be a specific women's or men's group. Your school may also offer the chance to live in community with students who share similar values or interests."

From Bibiana Joohyun Ro: "Your message of the Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team to the participants of the VII GA in Bangkok, Thailand was announced on the second day. It showed us solidarity of SCCs between Eastern Africa and Asia. I hope we can continue to interact, enrich and strengthen each other for SCCs."

From Father Michael Li, a priest from China, currently studying at the John Paul II Institute in Washington, DC, USA and living at the Theological College in Washington. "I am from Ningbo Diocese near Shanghai, China. Our Cathedral Parish of the Assumption has 26 Small Bible Study Groups (SBSGs) that meet weekly. These SCCs are the basic structure of the parish and are supported by the local Chinese bishop. The leaders attend a training once a week and provide support and feedback to the pastor. There is a priest and three volunteers who visit these Small Communities regularly."

Deacon John Bosco Odongo, CM explains his ministry in Nairobi, Kenya:

"I am asked to present on these topics in formation meetings of our Associate Seminarians: Seven Steps of prayer in SCCs, activities in the SCCs, leadership in SCCs and in our Vincentian Congregation, introduction to Skype SCC St. Isidore, website of the SCCs and Facebook for the SCCs' How to prepare homilies (here I want to emphasize the importance of listening to the sharing of the SCCs Members so as to inform our homily preparations and presentation), Vincentian virtues and vows (for the passing on of the Vincentian heritage and identity). These are the topics we agreed with the formation director of the associates to start with. May God help me to pass the right message to his people. As you know these are seminarians and their director are also involved in ministry in SCCs every weekend. So training them will help them to facilitate better the SCCs' life and pastoral ministry. Pray for me to be the instrument that the Lord wants me to be. Most importantly, to be bold and creative, and to lead his people to enter deeply into a new way of being church, the church in the neighborhood.

The SCCs are the most important aspect of our formation since some of our guys will be working in the parishes and popular missions. This can only be effective when done in collaboration with the SCC leaders and members. Moreover, these ministries can only be done and perfected within the context of the SCCs. This is a good example of how the formation and training of Catholic seminarians is "different" in Eastern Africa as compared to the West (Europe and North America). SCCs are a priority.

Our free, online Ebook states: “Another learning from Asia is the growing importance of Basic Human Communities (BHCs) in the context of challenges faced by SCCs/BECs in interreligious dialog. Asia is the cradle of the world's major religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. It is the birthplace of many other spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Sikhism and Shintoism. Millions also espouse traditional or tribal religions, with varying degrees of structured ritual and formal religious teaching. Please share your experiences in Asia and Africa of forming BHCs with Muslims. Positive experiences and examples can overcome the division and disunity in the world today.”

SCCs are described as the "Church on the Neighborhood." In our African SCCs some of our neighbors are Muslims. How are we relating to them/interacting with them/working with them on common interests? Please give your answers below:

From Joseph G. Healey: “In our SCCs let us visit our Muslim neighbors and pray with them for peace and good relationships on the local level and on the world level.”

From Ben Wanjala: A few bad Muslims do not represent Islam. Many are good and they are our brothers and sisters. We should pray for them for better understanding.”

From Mary-Queen O. Griffith: “In our SCCs @ Our Lady Seat of Wisdom Parish in Lagos Archdiocese, Nigeria we encourage Muslims around us to be faithful to their prayers and live as brothers and sisters.”

From San Bernardino Diocese: "Working alongside local Hispanic parish leaders, Ana Garcia has launched Small Faith Communities (SFCs) in various parishes in San Bernardino Diocese, California, USA that were struggling to begin a Hispanic ministry. Now Hispanic Catholics have a place where they can come to deepen and share their faith with others in the parish. They now feel like they have a place where they belong and can worship God in their own language and with their own cultural traditions. Small Faith Communities allow for volunteers to invest in the development of leadership at a local level. More importantly, Small Faith Communities become local advocates for community development. They have a profound impact on bringing in new families, developing new innovative outreach ministries and supporting the local pastor to grow the Catholic Church in their area.”

From Joseph G. Healey: “In the USA I am continuing to do research on Small Groups and their many types and distinctions. Recently I am studying specific Secular Small Groups. The bottom line is that I am trying to demonstrate that Small Christian Communities (capitalized for a reason) are an official pastoral priority and structure in the Catholic Church in different parts of the world such as Eastern Africa and different from the many other Small Apostolic Groups.”

“On 30 November world leaders will inaugurate the Paris Climate Summit (called COP21) and sign a treaty to tackle the climate crisis. On 29 November what are our SCCs going to do as millions of Catholics join the Global Climate March to call for climate action. Marches will take place in over 3,000 locations around the world including Nairobi, Kenya. Let world leaders know we stand behind Pope Francis in his call to defend Mother Earth!”

From Mary-Queen O. Griffith: “Am new to Small Christian Communities. SCCs were

introduced in my parish in Lagos, Nigeria a few months ago. The meetings are held in my house every Tuesdays for one hour. We had election on Tuesday and I was elected as one of the coordinators. I want to learn more about the SCCs.”

From Kimori Forer: “It was a grace for us members of St. Kizito SCC, the Catholic Church and the country of Kenya at large to have had a chance of being visited by Pope Francis. The Pope stayed with us for three days. On the third day he met the poor people from the slums at St. Joseph the Worker Parish. On his way to Kangemi most of us of St. Kizito SCC, in particular the small boy Richard Quinn junior, were blessed at the Emmaus gate. In all the three days the St. Kizito members mainly Orondo, Sammy, Ben, Paul, Josphat, Annastasia and Kimori were given responsibilities of taking care of the guests’ luggage. In return we received rosaries from the Pope. Indeed it was blessed moment to St. Kizito SCC. God bless Kenya.”

From Joseph Healey: “After a visit to the San Francisco Bay Area of California, USA here are some of my findings on Small Christian Communities. I am using “Small Groups” as the umbrella term for those 5,000+ groups that we have researched and talked about (based on the original Notre Dame research). The term “small groups” appears 133 times and “small group” 222 times in my Ebook. The three main patterns on this present visit and research are:

1. Rich diversity of small groups. Many, many names, varieties and experiences.
2. The *Bible* is read and reflected upon in many small groups, but mainly *Bible* study with few groups reading the Gospel of the following Sunday.
3. Optional style. Most small groups are not part of a structured and prioritized pastoral plan.

One classification of small group is:

Small Apostolic Group/Small Church Group/Small Prayer Group/Small Spiritual Group/Small Religious Group

Small Christian Communities (capitalized for a reason) are an official pastoral priority and structure in the Catholic Church in some parts of the world and different from the many other Small Apostolic Groups. SCCs are part of the official theological, pastoral and ecclesial structure. In the Eastern African experience they are Small Neighborhood Parish Based Groups and described as Small Lectionary-based Faith-sharing Groups.”

From Alamanjames Omondi: “Special attention folks!! This coming Sunday, 6 December, St. Silvester SCC in-conjunction with the Youth Committee invites you to participate in the St. Silvester SCC Super 8 football (soccer) Tournament. Simple rules: 8 players from each jumuiya consisting of (1 Seminarian, 2 ladies and 5 gents) failure of which you will play with less people. 3,000/= shillings prize money to be WON. Note: Each game will only be played for 15 minutes of 8 min in each half. Venue: Holy Cross Catholic Church Dandora grounds, Nairobi, Kenya. Time: 2 pm--6 pm. If you are seeing this, just think hard and consider, what 3,000/= could do for your jumuiya in this FESTIVE SEASON!!”

From Alphonse Omolo: “SCC members are in solidarity with suffering and struggling people around the world. So Alphonse Omolo, the Moderator of the St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC, and based in Kisumu, Kenya can write: ‘We remember, in prayers 14 people who died and 17 who were critically injured in a shooting in California, USA which took place a few days ago.’”

From Irene Wilson in Australia: "I wanted to share with you some developments in my own SCC journey over the past 12 months. This year I became quite enthusiastic about applying to the Centre for Religious Studies at Monash University to undertake a PhD on the Catholic experience of SCCs in Australia. The marvelous thing about Monash is that PhDs are free, in that doctoral candidates have their expenses covered by the myriad of grants on offer!

This proposed project of mine was partly motivated by the new growth I was able to uncover for the 2014 web conference. However, as I did the ground work I was made aware that small groups, especially that new flush in W. A., had become "visionless." And I know from experience that other small groups closer to home are more like well-meaning prayer groups than anything else. Feeling pretty flat I pushed the pause button on the project. Then recently a circle of women friends suggested that I should write a book about my SCC experience. It was an instant boost! At the very least I must synthesize the material I have, and all the valuable resources that Jim Cranswick passed on to me during his life time. Perhaps it will shape into a book - maybe even a PhD eventually! Who knows! So that's my aim for 2016."

From Bishop Colin Davies: "The implementation of having Small Eucharistic Communities is based on the whole concept of SCCs. There is some hope of progress, but it is not sufficiently understood that the New Evangelisation needs a great number of very active ordained priests with a SCC mentality and an involved laity. The Catholic Church in Kenya has grown impressively though it needs a deep SCC spirituality."

OPEN LETTER FROM YOUNG ADULT CATHOLIC LEADERS TO POPE FRANCIS: "BEING CHURCH AT THE PERIPHERIES:"

"Without denying the role of the parish, we know the value of the Faith-sharing groups and Small Christian Communities. These communities give our daily lives meaning and support. But we know that Small Communities cannot do it alone. We must join our local communities together in broader networks and movements. As you recently pointed out, 'the future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organize.' We want to organize."

From Sophie Chebet: "At St. John the Evangelist Parish, we have family day next week. We prepared also a skit to showcase the importance of Small Community (Jumuiya) and the power of prayer. Karibuni wote."

St. Agatha's Joy Women's Tailoring Group in St. Kizito SCC in Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya received a nice message from Sr. Catherine for the Maryknoll Sisters at Maryknoll, NY who were missioned to Africa: "Thank you for the African crafts for our International Bazaar. We were so delighted to have such lovely things and most everything was quickly sold. The baskets were beautiful and so were the dresses and shirts. Please express our deep gratitude to the women who spent their time making the baskets and sewing the clothes. May God bless them."

What are you and your SCC doing to celebrate the Jubilee Year of Mercy from December, 2015 to November, 2016? Please give your concrete examples below.

Part of the official prayer reads:

"Send your Spirit and consecrate every one of us with its anointing, so that the Jubilee of Mercy may be a year of grace from the Lord, and that your Catholic Church, with renewed enthusiasm, may bring good news to the poor, proclaim liberty to captives and the oppressed, and restore sight to the blind."

From Bob Pelton, CSC at Notre Dame, Indiana, USA: "I am gradually transforming my Latin American library to our Moreau Seminary Library. I am placing with those resources the important early documents about the SCC meetings we have sponsored from here, and in Colombia. You have seen these sources. They would be in a safe and secure place. Also, as I continue my research into Blessed Oscar Romero, I have discovered some interesting information about Romero and his relationship to the SCCs. If this might provide interesting to your work, I'll check this further and prepare an article which might be of interest for your archives."

"As we read the Christmas Gospel of St. Luke I was struck by verse: 2:2: 'This taxing was made when Cyrenius was the Governor of Syria.' Now over 2000 years later we celebrate the birth of the Prince of Peace while modern-day Syria has a civil war and millions of Syrian refugees walk the planet earth."

From the NEWMAN CATHOLIC STUDENT CENTER AT THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA, USA: "You've probably heard some of your friends talk about going to a "Bible Study." SCCs are like a Bible Study, but instead of just reading a part of Scripture to try and understand it intellectually, we're going to ask the question: "And how does this apply to me as a 21st Century Christian living on a college campus?" We'll start with a passage from the Bible, read a brief reflection, and then discuss how that week's readings hit us. Groups will be 8-10 students and will meet on a night and time that work best for your schedule! Some will even meet right in the dorms!"

"Ethiopia is hit by worst drought in decades. The UN says about 8.2 million people need emergency food aid in Ethiopia, nearly double the number six months ago. May our SCCs be in solidarity with the people in Ethiopia and pray for and with them in this New Year of 2016."

"This week I visited relatives in Our Lady of Peace Parish, New Providence, New Jersey, USA. The parish has started the "Be My Witness" program presented by RENEW International. It invites all parishioners to become partners in the New Evangelization using parish-based small groups — a proven way to encounter Christ, reawaken faith, and motivate missionary outreach. In the first phase in 2015 during the first six months RENEW International guided the parish leadership (staff, pastoral councils, and key leaders) through the transformation process with training and consultation. In the second phase in 2016 small group members will explore key insights from *The Joy of the Gospel* and develop the attitudes and behaviors of missionary disciples. The 12-session book and DVD work together seamlessly to highlight the attitudes and behaviors of disciples. "In all its activities, the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities ... and a center of constant missionary outreach" (Pope Francis in *The Joy of the Gospel*). See "Be My Witness," a program of RENEW International. <https://bemywitness.org/en>

From Alphonse Omolo:

Dear Members of our St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC,

Lots of New Year's blessings with hopes that you are all doing well. I welcome you to our meeting after a Christmas and New Year's break.

I would also request that you to pray for Fr. Febian Pikiti (a member of our AMECEA SCC Training Team) who lost his mother on 24 December. Fr. Febian traveled to Zambia to be with the mother in her final moments. May her soul rest in eternal peace!

The next meeting, on Tuesday, 5 January 2016 at 8 am in Texas; 9 am in New Jersey; 3 pm in Germany, 2 pm in the UK, 2 pm in Accra and 5 pm in Kenya and Tanzania. Next Sunday, 9 January, 2016 is the Baptism of the Lord, the Gospel reading is Luke 3:15-16, 21-22.

Kindly let us know if you will attend.”

“Father Bernard Balun from Indonesia is presently writing his thesis at the Collegio San Paolo Apostolo in Rome on co-responsibility and participating structures in the parish. A major part of his thesis is to talk about how the Small Christian Communities determine the structure in the parish as a communion of communities. He is writing the historical background of the SCCs and found the article on the web: “Historical Development of the Small Christian Communities/Basic Ecclesial Communities in Africa.” Restructuring parishes into a SCCs pastoral model of church is very important today.”

"Reforming Parish Structures to Create a Participatory Church of SCCs in Pangkalpinang Diocese, Indonesia"
By Bernard Balun

Link: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/asia/indonesia/356-reforming-parish-structures-to-create-a-participatory-church-of-sccs-in-pangkalpinang-diocese-indonesia.html>

This article is now posted on our SCCs Website under “Indonesia” under “Asia.” It is an important contribution. Our new research indicates that restructuring is the BEST way to build this new SCC Pastoral Model of Church.

[Reforming Parish Structures to Create a Participatory Church of SCCs in Pangkalpinang Diocese,...](#)

With a vision to establish a global networking website for Small Christian Communities (SCCs) worldwide, we intend to share SCCs contact information, events, materials, and news for each of the six continents.

SCCs in St. Bridgid Parish, San Antonio, Texas, USA will be the topic of the CTSA show hosted by the Maryknoll Mission Educator: "Hispaos en Mision." Belza Ramos, Lay Coordinator for SCCs at St. Brigid will be interviewed. The show will air Thursday, January 14, 2016 at 6:30 PM and again on Sunday the January 17, 2016 at 4:30 PM. You must have Time Warner Cable TV to view.

Yesterday I spoke with layman Josphat Mulinya, Chairperson of St. Kizito SCC, in Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya about how our SCCs can celebrate the 2016 Jubilee Year of Mercy. We can choose specific “Corporal Works of Mercy:”

- Feed the hungry.
 - Give drink to the thirsty.
 - Clothe the naked.
 - Shelter the homeless.
 - Visit the sick.
 - Visit the imprisoned.
 - Bury the dead.
- and specific “Spiritual Works of Mercy:”

- . Instruct the ignorant.
- Counsel the doubtful.
- Admonish sinners.
- Bear wrongs patiently.
- Forgive offences willingly.
- Comfort the afflicted.
- Pray for the living and the dead.

A SCC in Machakos Diocese, Kenya has put this into practice by buying a wheelchair for one of its members who has a disability and cannot walk.

From Sophia Chebet: “Happy New Year 2016 to all the SCCs Team and members of SCCs. Am very grateful for your encouragement, prayers, support and accompaniment since I started this project of building a little house in Kiserian, Kenya. We moved in on 1 January 2016. It is not yet complete and so many things still pending, but we are so grateful to God and all our friends who have stood by us to date. May God bless you all abundantly. My new Small Christian Community is St. Josephine Bakhita of St. Mary’s Parish, Kiserian in Ngong Diocese. At the moment we are trying to adjust ourselves to this new environment. Soon we get a chance for our jumuiya members to visit us for our house warming, Eucharistic Celebration and official blessing. I will invite you all to come and witness what the Lord has done for us. Indeed, this is our 2015 Miracle. Those who are doubting Thomases, please believe and trust in the Lord Jesus because there is NOTHING IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM!!!

From Joseph Healey: “Written reflection sent to members of our St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC that will meet online on Tuesday, 12 January, 2016: Here is my reflection on *John* 2:1 – 11:

This wedding feast of Cana is a clear reminder of the importance of the Sacrament of Marriage and how we need to promote sacramental marriages more among the young people in our SCCs. Our free, online Ebook Appendix 3 on “Lay Ecclesial Ministries in Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa” includes this ministry:

Marriage Minister that goes by many names (alphabetically):

1. Marriage Pastoral Accompanier (before and after marriage). Also referred to as Marriage Mentor after marriage.
2. Single Mother Pastoral Accompanier.
3. Marriage Animator (before marriage like a Formation Animator).
4. Marriage Counselor (after marriage).

May our SCCs choose the right Marriage Ministers who take their accompaniment services seriously.”

Special prayers for:

Program of Elections in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya (and other dioceses in Kenya) from 17 January 2016 on following the Pastoral Guidelines.

1. Small Christian Communities: 17 or 24 January, 2016
2. Out-station Councils: 31 January or 7 February, 2016
3. Parish Pastoral Council: 14 or 21 February, 2016
4. Deanery Pastoral Council: Weekend of 5 or 12 March, 2016
5. Archdiocesan Pastoral Council: Deanery Executives will meet on Saturday, 23 April, 2016

This includes the proper handing over from the out-going leaders to the in-coming leaders before the commissioning of the new leaders as stipulated in the Pastoral Guidelines. Here we see the principles of subsidiarity and decentralization in action starting from below.

From Hailu Adalo: “I humbly ask you to remember us here in South Africa in your prayers on Sunday, 17 January 2016. We have a special gathering to discuss our SCCs’ spiritual and social issues during this year 2016. The Ethiopian and Eritrean SCC members will join from three diocesan parishes to show their Christian unity in this foreign land because our SCC life comes from the verse in *Psalms* 133:1 "How good it is, how pleasant, where the people dwell as one!" We are expecting a chaplain from the Ethiopian Capuchin Congregation sent by H. E Cardinal Berhanyesus and Capuchins of Ethiopia Council of good will. Since 2010 our SCC members have been struggling a lot to understand the local language because we are so unique in Africa. NOTE: Language is very important to organize well our SCCs here in South Africa. The *Bible* says "but in the church I would rather speak five words with my mind, so as to instruct others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue." (1 *Corinthians* 14:19). Wishing a “Merciful 2016” to you all!”

From John Siyumbu: “Yesterday, Fr. Healey and I attended the St. Kizito SCC session in Waruku, Nairobi. The vibrancy of our faith in the SCC was a witness of the presence of God among His people.



From Ed Schreurs: "In the Netherlands we have 50 Small Catholic Communities (SCCs). Shortly I will send them information about your marvelous website. You may include our country under the button Europe. The small community in my village Best is called Antonius in Beweging. You can have a look under the link Anthony:
<http://www.antoniusinbeweging-best.nl/>

I myself attended the Council 50 Conference on "Towards a Church – Inspired by the Gospel – for the World" in Rome in November, 2015. With 100 participants we committed ourselves to revive the ideas of Vatican II by signing a pact. I attach the relevant links. I accepted the job of collecting as many addresses as possible of likeminded associations. I wonder what we could do together. Personally I organize dialogs as you can read on my website: www.jhn-23.info

Links:

The Pact 6 pages
 Summary for the press 3 pages
 Sign the pact

Quotation from the "Council 50 Declaration/Pact:"

“Towards a Church Inspired by the Gospel for a World of Peace, Justice and Solidarity: A Pact of Disciples of Jesus”

Includes this section on BECS/SCCs:

2.2 BASE ECCLESIAL COMMUNITIES

Aware

- of secularization processes in the modern world

- of Pope Francis's call for all the faithful to be involved in the church's evangelical mission, and
- of the need to replace the model of the church presently organized as a hierarchical pyramid;

Encouraged

- by the growing numbers of lay people all over the world who are engaged in building a more horizontal and inclusive church, and
- by the growing relationships of dialog and friendship among Christians ecumenically and with other religions,

We commit ourselves

- to build a church that embraces Base Ecclesial Communities as its fundamental model for being church
- to focus our communities on action for justice, peace and the integrity of creation
- as church to ask publicly for forgiveness from all who seek to be recognized as members of the People of God but who have been marginalized or rejected and hurt by our doctrines or practices, and
- to work actively for ecumenical and inter-faith dialog, collaboration and friendship.

From Malralf Jiminez Mendivil: "My visit to the SCC of St. Luke in Mukuru, OLQP South B for the election of their new leaders was a wonderful experience. Let us continue praying for all of them so they will be ONE..." "Special thanks to our SCC members for electing new leaders last Sunday in Nairobi Archdiocese. Let's support them, accompany them and pray for them..." "May God bless all the leaders of our SCCs!"

"Students in our SCCs Classes at Tangaza University College and Don Bosco Utume Salesian Theological College in Nairobi, Kenya are welcome to join our SCCs Facebook Family to share their SCCs experiences and insights."

"Most of the attention is on the election of the new chairperson of the SCC, but the election of the leaders in the other lay ecclesial ministries is important too. The pastor of Kiserian Parish in Ngong Diocese, Kenya points out that Catholics who have not been married sacramentally can still be chosen for certain SCCs leadership positions such as

- Justice and Peace Animator
- Good Neighbor/Good Samaritan/Promoter of Community Spirit
- Servant of the Poor/Helper of the Needy
- Health Servant/Volunteer Community HealthCare Worker (CHW) or Minister
- Projects/Development Coordinator"

"Congratulations to the newly elected leaders in our SCCs in Kenya. Of the 21 future challenges, priorities and actions of SCCs in Eastern Africa, Priority No. 3 is: 'Train SCC leaders/animations/facilitators/coordinators in animation, facilitation and coordination skills.' This is an on-going process. Those who facilitate the *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection Services* need regular updating and renewal. Also new people need to be trained to facilitate groups. Our research shows that bad habits can creep in and the sharing and reflection can change into a teaching mode (where one person takes over) or into a discussion mode. Thus training SCC leaders in group dynamic skills is important."

From Benard Wajala: “I would like to take this opportunity to thank all my SCC members of St. Kizito for their commitment throughout the year 2015. On Sunday 24/1/2016 we had elections whereby fifteen members were elected as per the list below:

1. **Chairman** *Paul Mboya*
Vice chairman *Dominica Musyoka*
2. **Secretary** *Catherine Mbaluka*
Vice secretary *Fansisca Pamella*
3. **Treasurer** *Salome Musili*
4. **Liturgy Leader** *Benard Wanjala*
Vice Liturgy *Gabriel Mwatela*
5. **Leader of Good Neighboring** *Michael Orondo*
Vice Leader of Good Neighboring *Annastacia Syombua*
6. **Matrimony Leader** *Jacklyne Oduor*
Vice Matrimony Leader *Sammy Ngunga*
7. **Youth Leader** *Berita Nzula*
Vice Youth Leader *Justus Muasya*
8. **PMC Leader** *Joyce Atanus*
Vice PMC Leader *Paul Makau*

Elections were conducted by Father Stephen Mukami together with Sister Mary Nelsa.

From Deacon Charles Ndumbi, SVD: “Sunday Reflection: Paul says as our body has many parts with different functions, so too our Christian calling requires of each one of us to discern the ministry that we are called to carry out in the Catholic Church such as: Leaders of SCCs, prophets, apostles, parish priests, etc. God has given everybody gift, use it to contribute to the growth of Christ’s body, the church. Let’s pray that the spirit of God may give us strength to be faithful to the word of God. Amen!”

“The theme of our SCCs Classes in Nairobi this week is: “The Importance of Lay Involvement in the Missionary Outreach of SCCs in Eastern Africa.” We are studying the Triangle of Laity/SCCs/Mission. Two Kenyan laymen spoke. We discussed key obstacles and problems in the growth of SCCs and their pastoral solutions. We gave many examples of Youth SCCs like the Fish Group in Kisumu, Kenya and and the active involvement of women in SCCs and Catholic Church.”

From Michael Orondo: “As leaders and members of SCCs we have one goal: To convey the love and tenderness of Christ to those who are most in need.” This is a very important comment from the former Liturgy Leader of St. Kizito SCC. How do SCC members live/put into practice the 2016 Jubilee Year of Mercy? Pope Francis urges to practice and the corporal and spiritual works of mercy in our SCCs. How many works can we name? How do we live them on a daily basis -- especially in reaching out to the margined and those on the peripheries.

In our SCCs Class at Utume (Salesians) today we reported on the elections taking place in the SCCs this month. We evaluated both the successes and failures as a "learning moment." We studied the importance of the chairperson stepping down after two terms. This sets an example for government and other organizations' elections.

“In our SCCs Class at Tangaza today when the internet connectivity went down, the students with Smartphones used my Samsung Galaxy Mobile Hotspot to connect to our SCCs Website and we analyzed some of the free, online E-Resources.”

“During our Theological Symposium at Tangaza today our Small Discussion Group (Small Breakout Session) reflected on this question: ‘*Ad Gentes* emphasizes that through Baptism all Christians are called to be missionaries and evangelizers. 99% of the members of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) are lay people. How are they promoting missionary awareness and sharing their faith with others?’ We used a Group Dynamics Method/Tool to involve everyone in the discussion. When one person finished sharing, he or she called on another person in the group and so on until everyone had shared at least once. This improved the quality (richness) and the focus of the sharing. Our Breakout Session focused on how SCC members learn from each other and grow by sharing their grassroots experiences together.”

“No. 5 under “Checklist of 16 Common Activities in Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa Today” is: ‘SCC as a Special Group for Faith-sharing, Formation, Study (Bible, Creed, the Sacraments, a Catholic Church Document, Constitutions of a Religious Community, Religious Book, Film/Movie, DVD, Video, Audio Tape, etc.), Counseling, etc.’ A SCC could study the six chapters of *Ad Gentes* in six consecutive weeks. One recommendation from the symposium: Publish a simplified booklet on *Ad Gentes* for lay people in English called "Mission to All People."

From Vincent Rotich, Isiolo Diocese, Kenya: “In the SCCs Poll I voted for 'relationships' because SCCs bring us together as members of the Family of God to love one another.”

"SCCs Involvement in the 2016 Kenya Lenten Campaign on the theme 'Peaceful and Prosperous Kenya...My Responsibility:' Two weeks ahead, our SCCs Classes in Nairobi will be studying “Week 3 (Third Sunday of Lent – 28 February, 2016) on “Family Values:” The key discussion question in Step Three (“Act”) is: “As a communion of families in the neighborhood what basic family values can Small Christian Communities emphasize and promote? How?”

Some responses:

From Ben Wanjala: “By helping the couples who live together but go to different churches. Also help those who have not married in church to do so.” NOTE: These are two challenges in Kenya today. Mixed marriages (Catholics married to Protestants or those of other faiths). Catholic couples not married in a Catholic Church yet. Let us pastoral accompany both situations.

From the Moderator: “The drawing (cartoon) on page 18 shows a happy family eating together that is a perfect setting to share family values.”

From Joseph G Healey: “A key is to answer this question in the context of performing the corporal and spiritual works of mercy in the extended family during this 2016 Jubilee Year of Mercy.”

From Peter Oakalet, the Coordinator of SCCs in Soroti Diocese, Uganda:

“Below is our Pastoral Plan in Soroti Diocese, Uganda:

1. Prioritize the establishment of Youth SCCs.
2. Encourage Lay Ecclesial Ministries of different Pastoral Companiers of SCCs.
3. Lay basic strategies for authentic SCCs.
4. Compilation of Small Christian Communities statistics.
5. Relevance of Small Christian Communities.
6. Restructure the existing Small Christian Communities in our diocese.
7. Introduce the Word of God by Bible Sharing in Small Christian Communities meetings.
8. Introduce the Word of God and Small Christian Communities Masses in the Catholic Diocese of Soroti.
9. Emphasize forgiveness in Small Christian Communities because the SCCs form a Big Church; staying at peace with each member brings a sense of grassroots evangelization.
10. Encourage every Catholic Faithful to become an active member of a Small Christian Community in his or her's local geographical area (the church in the neighborhood pastoral model).
11. Encourage Missionary Vocations so that there are capable and holy men and women still willing to take the faith beyond their homeland.
12. Implore the parish priests to participate in the SCCs meetings so that they can know what the community members are doing. This is the only way they can guide the Small Christian Communities in their parishes.
13. Build Small Christian Communities as grassroots evangelization.”

An interesting online conversation was triggered as follows:

From SCCs Website Moderator, Nairobi: “After our SCCs Class at Tangaza yesterday the question was asked: ‘What parish in Africa has the most SCCs?’ Our SCCs Research Team does not know so we welcome answers from members of this SCCs Facebook Page. We do not know the exact answer, but it is over 200. We have heard of a parish with 305 SCCs in Moshi, Tanzania, a parish with over 225 SCCs in Machakos, Kenya, etc.”

From Raphael Okusaga, Lagos: “We have over 50 parishes in Lagos Archdiocese that have SCC Centers. My parish of St. Matthew Amukoko has 48 SCC Centers.”

From SCCs Website Moderator, Nairobi: “Thank you, Raphael. The Nigerian students (and others) in my two SCCs classes here in Nairobi, Kenya are asking the meaning of ‘SCC Centers.’ Is this the same as a SCC in Eastern Africa that is about 15-20 people?”

From Raphael Okusaga, Lagos: “Yes, the same in operation and philosophy, but with some variations based on environment. Our SCC groups meet at a specific location in the neighborhood with 20 To 30 members. It is not rotational, i.e. the SCC members meet in the same place each week. By the way, our parish priest is from Kenya, Fr. Emma Likoko, SPS.”

From SCCs Website Moderator, Nairobi: “In our Utume Class in Nairobi we learned that these "centers" in Nigeria refer to small groups -- like SCCs and small devotional groups.

From Moses Ndolo: “We salute you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen. I am Moses Ndolo, the chairperson of St. Veronica Small Christian Community, St. Paul Catholic Parish, Mombasa Archdiocese.

We are kindly appealing to the AMECEASmall Christian Communities Training Team to support us with any contribution to help us save the precious life of one of our members called Mr. Eric Kimath who needs a wheelchair to help him move. The total cost on the wheelchair is Kshs 86,500/= The following are our contributions:

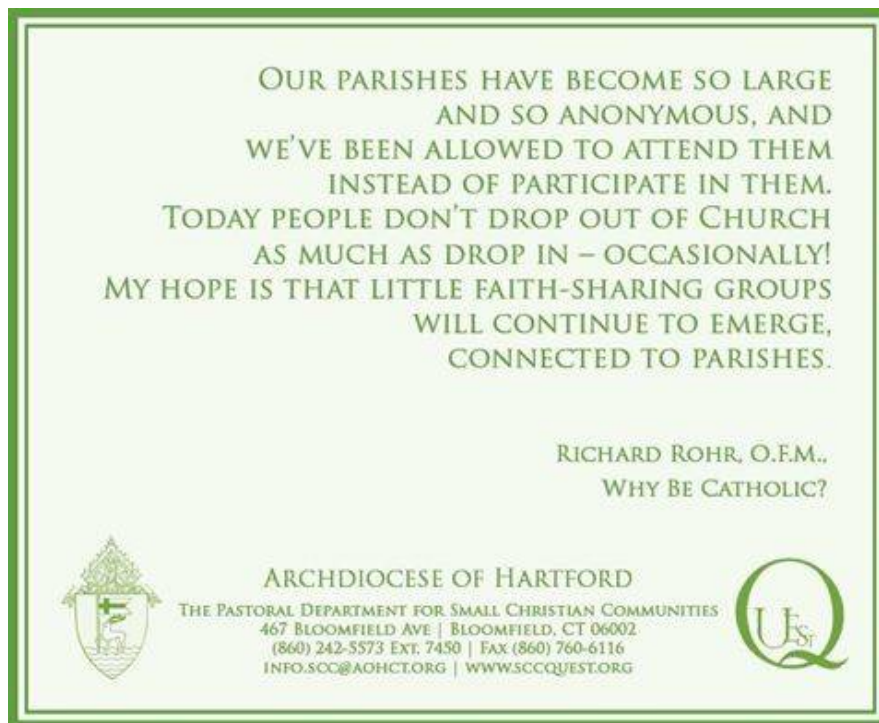
- St. Veronica SCC contribution Kshs 20,000
- St. Paul Catholic Parish contribution Kshs 15,000
- Other 8 SCCs contribution Kshs 18,000

Total collection raised Kshs 53,000
Balance required Kshs 33,500

Any contribution extended to us as per our humble request will be very much highly appreciated as we wait to hear from you soon.

Yours in Christ
Moses Ndolo
Chairperson St. Veronica SCC”

“Here is a good quotation on the importance of SCCs:”



“A reminder to SCC members in Kenya: Today in the 2016 Kenya Lenten Campaign on the theme of Week 3 on ‘Family Values’ we are reflecting on the the key discussion question in Step Three (“Act”): ‘As a communion of families in the neighborhood what basic family values can Small Christian Communities emphasize and promote? How?’ Two basic family values are two of the spiritual works of mercy: bear wrongs patiently and forgive offenses willingly. It is interesting that in our SCCs Poll on: The best part of my Small Christian Community is: ... most SCC members vote for relationships.”

“During this 2016 Jubilee Year of Mercy one of the seven corporal Works of Mercy” is to “visit the imprisoned.” Deacon Sylvester Chimenge, MAfr. is a member of our SCCs Class at Tangaza University College in Nairobi. As part of his MPM Thesis he is writing about his diaconate ministry in the three Kamati Prisons. Presently the Main Prison has 10 SCCs that serve as spiritual support groups and places of transformation. The Medium Prison has five SCCs. All the catechetical instructions, all the liturgical preparations and all the spiritual arrangements are done at the level of the SCCs.”

“Please pray for the repose of the soul of George Leandro Abok, the Father of Deacon John Bosco Odongo, CM who was a student in our SCCs Class at Tangaza University College in Nairobi in 2015 and presently is doing pastoral work in Kitale Diocese. He died on Friday, 4 March, 2016 and will be buried on Monday, 7 March, 2016. He is now one of our revered ancestors in Christ. May his soul rest in eternal peace.”

From Thomas Pouya: “Jumuiya members of St. Padri Pio Jumuiya in Tangaza University College during a sharing on the Gospel of the following Sunday:”



Coming soon: "Good Shepherd," a new biannual journal of the Department of Pastoral Theology of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (JDPT -- CUEA) in Nairobi, Kenya. Mission: "To promote pastoral conversion and missionary renewal by inspiring and empowering the People of the AMECEA Region and beyond through research and publication relevant to putting the faith in practice at the domestic and Small Christian Communities levels within the parish and Local Churches."

Reflection for Lent 2016:

"For centuries, Christians have engaged in spiritual disciplines⁹³⁰ to invite God to speak into their lives. From fasting to *Lectio Divina*, and from prayer to rest, the spiritual disciplines place us at God's feet—both when we practice them individually and with others. Spiritual disciplines are the secret to staying refreshed for ministry, so leaders especially gain from integrating them into life. But SCCs and other small groups benefit, too, when they practice together, often experiencing intimacy and growth."

"When are we going to have another Small Christian Communities (SCCs) National Convocation in the USA? These gatherings are important for sharing new ideas, support and networking." This post elicited these comments:

- I hope RENEW International can take the lead.
 -
- These convocations provide unique opportunities for gathering 'new knowledge' on the current development of SCCs and what measures are being implemented to improve SCCs all over the world.
- These gatherings are important for sharing new ideas, support and networking.
- We need another convocation.
- This can be an online (via the internet) convocation including a SCCs webinar.

From Joseph Healey: "Today I gave two lectures in the Ecclesiology Class at Hekima University College in Nairobi. There were 58 Second Year Theology students. My 14-page handout covered "Important Quotations Related to African Ecclesiology" (16 on "Content" and 8 on "Process/Method"). I presented the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church in Africa today following on Avery Dulles' six models. I received a generous stipend of 4,000/= Kenyan Shillings (\$40) that I will give to my St. Kizito SCC for the marginalized people and people on the peripheries (Pope Francis' words) in our economically poor, informal settlement of Waruku, Nairobi."

⁹³⁰ "What especially strikes me about these spiritual disciplines is that many have been traditionally practiced in groups—something we don't often do in our churches today. The early believers, though, understood their faith in community, and we can begin to regain this understanding when we practice spiritual disciplines together... We will help you introduce spiritual disciplines to your small groups. You'll learn about *lectio divina*, fasting, contemplative prayer, confession, and more. Plus, we've included helpful tips for incorporating these practices into a small-group setting and how to overcome common obstacles related to practicing as a group." Amy Jackson, "Spiritual Disciplines for Small Groups," *Small Groups Newsletter*, retrieved on 12 November, 2016, http://www.christianitytoday.com/lyris/smallgroups/archives/11-02-2016.html?utm_source=buildingssmallgroups-html&utm_medium=Newsletter&utm_term=9077722&utm_content=475384227&utm_campaign=email



Group Photo of the 2016 SCCs Class at Tangaza, Nairobi, Kenya

From Abel Muse of the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat: “Let us keep each other in our prayers. You are in our family prayer agenda. We ask you to remember the Ethiopian drought and hunger where millions of people are suffering. It is a hard time for many Ethiopians in different parts of the country. Still no rain in most parts of the country. The National Pastoral Activities Commission (PAC) had a meeting from March 20-23, 2016. The meeting was a Consultation on the Five Year Pastoral Activities Strategic Plan 2017-2021. The draft copy was prepared by the Pastoral Coordinators from 13 ecclesiastical jurisdictions together with the Bishop in Charge of the Pastoral Commission. In the SP the issue of SCCs was one of the top agenda especially how to activate and make the Biblical Apostolate live in the faithful. It is agreed that SCCs are the basis for Bible sharing, prayer and deep spirituality. We will communicate to you from our pastoral office for your suggestions about on how to go about it. We are planning to organize one workshop in July/August, 2016.”

“Yesterday I visited Deacon Sylvester Mimbululu Chimenge, M.Afr. who wrote his Master’s Thesis in Pastoral Ministry on "Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as a Platform for Continuous Catechesis in Eastern Africa -- Opportunities and Challenges: Case Study of Our Lady Queen of Peace Parish South B, Nairobi, Kenya." We participated in a Class of Adult Catechumens who will be baptized on Holy Saturday night including one woman from St. Paul SCC. We continue to explore the link between SCCs and the RCIA (Adult Catechumenate) and other celebrations of the sacraments such as matrimony. The SCC is an important "home" and support group for faith formation.”

From Sylvester Chimenge: “Here are the adult catechumens of Our Lay Queen of Peace, South B Parish who will be baptized this coming Saturday night, 26 March, 2016. We had a good discussion with them about the importance of Small Christian Communities in their spiritual growth. Our guest of honor was Mwanajumuiya Father Joseph Healey.”



From Alloys Nyakundi: 3/28, 05:18]: 1st Reading - *Acts 2:14, 22-33*.

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them, ‘Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words.
 22 Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs which God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know --
 23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the ...’ [See More](#)”

From Charles Ndumbi Douglas: “Five different SCCs are involved in infant baptisms during Easter at St. Cecilia Church, Ruai, Nairobi, Kenya.”



From Sammy Ngunga: “St. Kizito SCC members helped Agnes Alitsi and Benard (Ben) Wanjala to finish the steps of their marriage preparation over a period of several years. Their sacramental marriage finally took place during the 8 a.m. Mass on Easter Sunday at St. Austin’s Parish on 27 March, 2016 followed by a lively reception in the parish hall. They choose a married couple in Waruku – Herbert and Jacinta Nabangi as the Best Man and Matron of Honor. Hopefully they will actively accompany the new couple in their marriage. Congratulations are now in order, Ben & Agnes! We are proud of you, Ben. We are happy to have u as our Jumuiya Liturgy leader.”



From Alloys Nyakundi: “Am proud of St. Dominic SCC. We were voted the 2nd best SCC out of 9 SCCs at Kenyatta University (KU).”



Party party party of St. Patrick Small Christian Community Family of our larger St. Dominic SCC. You are all welcome to our celebration on Monday, 4 April, 2016. Brothers and sisters if u miss it, u miss a lot. Come and move to a different episode of your life. Welcome welcome.”

From a seminarian in our SCCs Class in Tangaza: "I am happy to say that my vocation and desire to serve in the Catholic Church as a priest and religious root back to my participation in St. Stephen SCC, Mabanga Sub-Parish in Kibabii Parish, Bungoma Diocese, Kenya. The SCC plays a major role in the formation of the child together with the family that instills family values."

From Alloys Nyakundi: 4/5, 05:28]: 1st Reading - *Acts 5:17-26*:

32 All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. 33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all 34 that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales 35 and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. 36 Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), 37 sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

From Alloys Nyakundi: “Am much humbled for the wonderful welcome we three students of KU got at Don Bosco Utume in presenting two topics:

1. ‘Participation of Youth in Small Christian Communities in Africa.’
2. ‘Forming Specific Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) in Africa.’

May God bless us and help us make the SCCs strong. I can’t forget to say *pongezi* to Father [Joseph G. Healey](#) who is working day and night to ensure that the SCCs are strong in Africa. *Makofi.*”

From Nancy Njehia: “I hope to get back to my former high school (Our Lady of Consolata Mugoiri Girls High School in Murang’a Diocese) and encourage the YCS to form Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) where the students can get spiritual growth and get to share as a small group.”

Comment: “This is very important, Nancy. If there are 500 Catholic girls in the YCS group, I hope you can help to form a number of Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) that combine Faith-sharing and Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection.”

“The April, 2016 issue of "The Update," a publication of Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya, has a nice article on our SCCs Class called “Our Course Was Different” (pages 6-7 with three photos). It can be accessed in three ways:

1. A printed copy has been posted on different bulletin boards at Tangaza.
2. A File Attachment containing the issue has been sent out to the Tangaza Email Mailing List.
3. The online version can be accessed on the Tangaza Website at the top right hand

side of the Front Page under “Tangaza Updates”: The direct link is: [http://tangaza.org/wp-cont.../2016/04/Tangazaupdate4-16.pdf...](http://tangaza.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Tangazaupdate4-16.pdf...)

“From 11-14 April, 2016 I will be visiting Meru Diocese, Kenya with diocesan priest Father Moses Muriira. We will visit St. Massimo Parish, the site of his SCC Practicum for his Master's Degree in Pastoral Ministry at Tangaza and animate a one-day SCCs Workshop on “Finding Pastoral Solutions to Ongoing Challenges in the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Meru Diocese” at St. Michael Retreat Centre. Prayers please.”



SCCs workshop in Meru Diocese organised by SCCs Diocesan Coordinator Father Lawrence Murori and facilitated by Father Joseph Healey and Father Moses Muriira. This great photo shows participants from one deanery praying together as a SCC.



Facilitator Father Joseph Healey (Father *Menda* meaning in Kimeru “the one who is loved”) gives his last word on the last day of the Small Christian Community Workshop in Meru.

“Radio Jangwani (the Swahili word for "desert"), is the Catholic FM Radio Station of Marsabit Diocese in northern Kenya. Every Saturday evening from 7 to 8 p.m. Bishop Peter Kihara has a one hour radio program when he reads and reflects on the Scripture Readings of the following Sunday and applies them to our daily lives. Let us hope that many SCC members are listening.”

Adapted "Prayer for Vocations 2016:"

“Father of mercy, who gave your Son for our salvation and who strengthens us always with the gifts of your Spirit, grant us Small Christian Communities which are alive, fervent and joyous, which are fountains of fraternal life, and which nurture in the young the desire to consecrate themselves to you and to the work of evangelization. Sustain these Small Christian Communities in their commitment to offer appropriate vocational catechesis and ways of proceeding towards each one’s particular consecration. Grant the wisdom needed for vocational discernment, so that in all things the greatness of your merciful love may shine forth. May Mary, Mother and guide of Jesus, intercede for each Small Christian community, so that, made fruitful by the Holy Spirit, it may be a source of true vocations for the service of the holy People of God.”

“New SCCs experiences are presented in our SCC classes. Today at Don Bosco Utume Salesian Theological College in Nairobi, Kenya a Salesian seminarian described his one year of pastoral ministry in St. Vincent de Paul Parish, Gumbo, Juba, South Sudan. The parish has four SCCs and he visited St. Peter SCC on four different occasions. The priests celebrate mass in the SCCs once a month.”

Anthony Dela Acquaye: “32 students of Don Bosco Utume Salesian Theological College, Nairobi, Kenya underwent a two credit course of 2 hours per week for 14 weeks with Mwanajumuiya Padri Joseph G. Healey. We brought the course to a successful end on Friday, 29 April, 2016.”



“We hope that this SCCs Facebook Page can be a "forum" for analysis, discussion, exchange, information, questions and answers, quotations and updates including brainstorming on pastoral and missionary issues and proposing pastoral solutions to particular challenges/problems. As a concrete example, a Spiritan Deacon wrote a Reflection Paper on “How to Divide a Large SCC into Two Smaller SCCs” in St. Mary’s Mukuru Kwa Njenga Catholic Parish in Nairobi. He came across an active St. Basil SCC with 97 committed members. Two pastoral solutions: meet three times a week so that 30 people can participate in the Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection each time. Start a YSCC for young people.” Our SCCs research clearly shows that the "key" is not the number of families or individual members registered in the small community. The key is the normal participation in the weekly Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection. It should be 15-20 members.”

Alloys Nyakundi: “Actually since I joined this page I can confess that my faith has grown and become more active in SCC issues. **NOTE:** One of the purposes of our SCCs Facebook Page is that it is an "important "space" (“place”) for spiritual, pastoral and theological conversation, discussion and sharing such as Faith-sharing.”

Moses Muriira. “May I humbly thank all the wanajumuyias for their support and prayers especially this year's Small Christian Communities class. I have completed my course work and practicum at Tangaza. Much gratitude to Mwanajumuyia Joe Healey for his support and encouragement. I need your prayers as I embark on writing my thesis in Meru, Kenya. I love you all. Wanajumuyia oyeee!!!”

Robert Mosi reports from Iramba Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania: "Last month we had elections in our 13 SCCs in the Main Center, Nyagasense. I was elected the Chairperson of St. Joachim SCC.”

From Evangelist Hailu Adalo, Ethiopian and Eritrean Community National Coordinator in South Africa: "The Ethiopian diocesan priest Father Tekelmariam Ammanuel Bulamo visited our Ethiopian and Eritrean Small Christian Community during the Easter celebrations. During his visit he celebrated masses in various diocesan parishes and participated in some special events in South Africa. He celebrated our Group Mass in our home language Amharic. Our Community Executive Committee members and the National Coordinator in South Africa are hoping to have our own Permanent Chaplain from Ethiopia."

Feedback from one of the seminarians in our January to March, 2016 SCCs Course in the eighth and last semester in Tangaza in Nairobi, Kenya: "Thank you for teaching us and sharing your experiences with us. It was a symbiotic classroom experience. Thank you for those visitors whose experiences ring live in us each day in varied ways. It is a good course to wind up theology with."

“Dr. Philomena Mwaura, Associate Professor in the Philosophy and Religious Studies Department at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya reports that two of her Master’s Degree students are writing their theses on Small Christian Communities (SCCs) – one on the SCCs in Nyanza and the other on the SCCs in Kiambu.”

“The new Bishop of Wa, Ghana, Bishop Richard Baawobr, MAfr, answered the question – ‘As the Bishop, what are some of the priority areas would you envisage to tackle?’ – by saying: ‘It will be the case, for example, of bringing the Word of God to the Small Christian Communities in our towns and villages.’”

“How many SCC members know that the Feast of Pentecost (15 May, 2016) is the second most important feast in the Liturgical Calendar of the Catholic Church. For more information the free, online digital Ebook -- "Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa" – has 44 references to Pentecost and 54 references to the Holy Spirit. This Ebook is available on the left hand side of the “Home Page” of the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at:http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../pdf/Build_new.pdf

“New book on SCCs:

Gobbo, Wilbert, "Critique of the Trinitarian Social Model of Leonardo Boff: Small Christian Communities of the Archdiocese of Tabora in Tanzania, a Case Study," Lambert Academic

Publishing, 2016. Available as a paperback (Print on Demand) on Amazon at:https://www.amazon.co.uk/Critique-Trinitarian.../ref=sr_1_1...

Paperback: 148 pages

Publisher: LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing (29 April 2016)

Language: English

Cost: £29.00

ISBN-10: 3659882666

ISBN-13: 978-3659882661”

Memories from Jeanne Hinton in Plymouth, England on 23 September, 2014: "At the moment we are planning together a Winter Fete in November in our local park and are about to take part in a city wide arts/culture initiative to bring together youth, students, refugees, people with disabilities and older persons to work together to make a difference in their neighborhoods through arts and creativity. I often think of the José Marins' BCCs workshop where he challenged those of us present 'to go to the furthest ends of our particular world'. In Lytchett it meant for me the village stores and the bus stop, here in Plymouth a little urban park!"

This reminds me so much of Pope Francis’s challenge to “evangelize the peripheries and the marginated” that is a special call to SCCs members.

The second article by a Tangaza student is now posted on our SCCs Website:
 "Improving the Effectiveness of Small Christian Communities in St. Jude Taddeo Kyarusenzi Catholic Parish, Fort Portal Diocese, Uganda"
 By Leonard Ronald Iragaba, CSC
<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../371-improving-th...>

“We just finished our weekly St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC Bible Reflection for next Sunday -- the Feast of the Holy Trinity. We prayed that SCC members would remember that the Trinity is the first ‘small community.’ Each SCC member can ask: 'What is my personal relationship to each member (person) of the Holy Trinity: to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit?’”



Members of St. Kizito SCC, Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya pose for a photo with Father Joseph Graham Healey, MM after the weekly Bible Sharing session at the Marian Statue on the Maryknoll Society Compound on Manyani Road West. They celebrate the readiness of his Golden Jubilee celebration of Maryknoll Missionary Priesthood to be held in New Jersey, USA on 12 June 2016.

Kenyan Mariannahill seminarian Benedict Kimutai from our Don Bosco Utume SCC Class reports:

The Small Christian Communities can use WhatsApp to pass information and engage themselves. For example, in St. Theresa of the Child Jesus Parish in Kericho Kenya Father John Paul Cheruiyot has empowered the Christians to interact through WhatsApp and Twitter. Every week in the SCCs WhatsApp Groups he poses a question for the Christians to reflect on. On Saturday evening he concludes with his contribution and the topic forms the basis of his homily on Sunday.

Just published:

Healey, Joseph, "When Smaller is Better: Small Faith Communities and the Future of the U.S. Church," "America," 24 May 2016, America Website, retrieved on 25 May, 2016, <http://americamagazine.org/issue/when-smaller-better>

This article treats four sections:

1. The Origins of Small Faith Communities.
2. Taking Hold on U.S. Campuses.
3. Small Groups as a Model for Change.
4. A Course for Action.

When it comes to nurturing faith, smaller is often better.

The church in America cannot ignore the success of small Christian communities.

AMERICAMAGAZINE.ORG⁹³¹

“VERBUM DEI:” WEEKLY PRAYER & SCRIPTURE GROUP

Every Sunday at 12:30 PM (after 11:00 am Mass)

Harvard Catholic Center, Rm 204 (Enter at 20 Arrow Street or at 29 Mount Auburn Street, Boston, Massachusetts, USA). Grad students and young professionals gather each Sunday as a Small Church Community to read and reflect on the Sunday readings and to share and pray about finding God in everyday life. E-mail: alex.angstrom@gmail.com Verbum Dei (Latin for the “Word of God”) is a Small Church Community that meets every Sunday at the Harvard Catholic Center in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. One member, a second-year Harvard graduate student said: “I certainly think that a small group based on *Bible* Study is an essential part of any Christian life. I would hope to find and encourage this kind of prayerful group engagement with scripture wherever I end up.”

“As students around the world do final exams, let us remember the words of one young woman in a weekly Small Faith-sharing Community at Santa Clara University, California, USA: “I need this period of prayer, reflection and Faith-sharing to ‘ground me’ for the intellectual challenge and pressure in the busy exam days ahead.”

From “The Field Hospital: Covering Parish Life” in *National Catholic Reporter* (3 June, 2016):

<http://ncronline.org/.../field-hospital-covering-parish-life-...>

If the Catholic church in North America “holds any aspirations of remaining relevant in the lives of millions of young adults,” the effectiveness and strength of Small Faith-sharing Communities -- of any name -- “constitute a grass-roots effort whose success” should not be ignored, posits Maryknoll Father Joseph Graham Healey in *America* magazine. The role of what are sometimes called Basic Ecclesial Communities could become all the more important as the number of priests plummets and a “steady and alarming drift” away from the institutional church continues, argues the scholar.

Three Gikuyu, Kenya Proverbs:

Traveling is learning.

Traveling is seeing.

Traveling opens one’s eyes.

During my visit to Maryknoll, NY, USA I met Father Ed Byrne, the Pastor of St. Ann's Parish in New York Archdiocese in Ossining, NY. He said that 70% of his parish are immigrants from Ecuador in South America. The parish has a wide variety of Spanish-speaking Small Prayer Groups:

⁹³¹ See the entry in the “Annotated Bibliography” for detailed feedback.

- contemplative (the most grounded group)
- charismatic
- devotional (many types)

"RENEW International Inspires Parishioners through Small Groups."

Peter Feuerherd | Jun. 9, 2016 *NCR Today*

"The Field Hospital"

The link is: <http://ncronline.org/blogs/ncr-today/renew-international-inspires-parishioners-through-small-groups>

From the NCR "Field Hospital Series:"

“Father Michael Saporito, pastor of St. Helen's Church in Westfield, New Jersey, USA said his participation in the Parish Catalyst Program reinforces that parishes need to intentionally plan, that cultural Catholicism no longer effectively brings Catholics into active participation.

‘The times have changed and people's churchgoing patterns have changed along with it. As a result, we have do a much better job at planning. We have to be intentional in all we do. We have to have goal statements that we really use. We have to make plans that we really keep ourselves accountable,’ he said.

One concrete result of *Parish Catalyst*: St. Helen's has implemented Small Faith-sharing Groups reflecting upon the papal 2016 Year of Mercy. The 50 groups have attracted 500 parishioners.’

“Nora Bolcon gave a very complete and very informative survey of the rich variety of Small Groups in the USA. Truly the Holy Spirit is working in these groups. On the *NCR Website* I replied to Nora: ‘This is very complete and very informative survey of the rich variety of Small Groups in the USA. Truly the Holy Spirit is working here. I am a Maryknoll Missionary Priest serving in nine countries in Eastern Africa. Our experience is quite different. Rather than a Small Group Model of Church we have a Small Christian Communities Model of Church. These two models are different in ecclesial structure and pastoral involvement. Our SCCs are parish-based, neighborhood small groups that meet weekly in homes to reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday and apply it to our daily life.’”

“As I visit parishes in the United States, I see the Small Group Model of Church in action. Parishes form Small Parish Groups of Catholics for a fixed number of weeks (for example, five to eight weeks) to discuss, reflect on and plan action steps on specific current topics or themes: Pope Francis' 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si (Praise Be to You)* on the environment and ecology; the 2016 Year of Mercy; a Small Reading Group on a book or article of current interest; etc.”



Ms. Jennifer Ehrentraut, a member of the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website and Maryknoll Sister Theresia Ndesoma, MM from Moshi Diocese in Tanzania at Father Joe Healey, MM's Golden Jubilee Anniversary Mass of Maryknoll Missionary Priesthood in New Vernon, New Jersey USA on 12 June, 2016.



From an article in the 4 June, 2016 issue of *The Tablet* (London, England):

“More and more people are convinced that small groups like the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA) are at the heart of evangelization, where people can reflect together in a personal way. Maybe there is a case for parishes to have small Faith-sharing groups for everyone in the parish, including post-RCIA groups. They would support new Catholics and old ones alike. These groups could be led by people who have experienced conversion and transformation through their experience of the RCIA. Through their involvement with these groups, I suspect they would grow and deepen in their relationship with Christ, thereby keeping the momentum going.”

“Monday, 20 June, 2016, is the annual United Nations World Refugee Day. May we SCC members pray for the many immigrants, migrants, refugees and internally displaced people around the world. We are reminded of the 26 Small Christian Communities in Holy Cross Parish in Kakuma Refugee Camp in Lodwar Diocese in northwestern Kenya. More information can be found on our SCCs Website.”

“Presently we are exploring possibilities to sponsor an ‘International Encounter of College Students Involved in Small Christian Communities to take place in New York, USA in Summer, 2017. Your suggestions are welcome.” **NOTE:** This post received the following comments:

1. We are preparing an “Encounter of College Students Involved in Small Christian Communities” to take place in late July--early August, 2017 at Manhattan College, Riverdale, New York, USA. The 110 participants will include three three-member teams

(delegations) from Africa: Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya; Lusaka, Zambia; and the International Movement of Catholic Students (IMCS) – Pax Romana -- (Nairobi, Kenya; Benin; Paris, France). The “Background Note” to the meeting states:

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is the “umbrella” term/overall term used in this Encounter and is the most common expression for this new way of being or becoming church/new pastoral model of church in many parts of the world. Specific Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) are found on college campuses and in parishes. Different terms are used in English in different places. BCC means “Basic Christian Community” and BEC means “Base [Basic] Ecclesial Community” and is sometimes written “Ecclesial Base [Basic] Community.” A variety of names are used in the USA. In some parishes and colleges/universities in the USA the specific name “Small Christian Communities” is not known or used, that is, it has very little “Name Recognition.” People would more immediately recognize “Small Groups” or “Small Prayer Groups” or “Small Church Communities” or “Small Faith Communities” or “Small Faith-sharing Communities” or “Small Bible Study Groups” or “Campus RENEW Groups” or “Christian Life Communities (CLCs).”

The challenge is to create a successful “branding” of the name and meaning of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs). “Communities” is deeper and more focused than the generic “groups” that can cover everything. “Christian” helps to give the SCC members a specific identity. In their weekly meetings SCC members emphasize both the values of Faith-sharing and Bible reflection. A combined version is lectionary-based Faith-sharing.

2. This is great idea. I am very happy to have been part of a Youth Small Christian Community at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya. It has been a nice experience among ourselves as the youth. I can't forget to recognize my membership and contribution to the Pax Romana (IMCS Kenya) family for the five years that I was on campus. This group introduced me to my life in campus the very first week when I stepped into Kenyatta University back in 2011. Bible Sharing, rosary, and sharing personal experiences as youth to make our Christian faith strong dominated our YSCC meetings.

Forming social media groups for our YSCCs has always helped members to share a lot even when we are far from each other and back to our local communities. Thanks to Fr. Joseph Healey. God bless you as inspire young people to remain strong in church.

3. This looks really great progress. Hopefully we could be able to organize an African version of the "Encounter" a year later. I will be happy to get involved in the preparation of the African version and I am certain Simon would be available too. That is dreaming for the near future and borrowing from the knowledge that will have been gathered from the "Encounter". Alloys will have experienced it firsthand. God's blessings and success with the planning.

4. Attending some SCCs classes in Tangaza University College and Don Bosco Utume, Nairobi, Kenya was an eye opener to me and my friends about the need to participate actively in the YSCCs. After interacting with some students and Father Joe Healey I came to understand the need and joy of YSCCs in our churches and universities today. They lay a strong base for our Christianity and the church. Members can be able to get enough time to share Bible verses more so the Sunday Gospel readings are more meaningful. Above all we can easily identify the challenges each member is facing and help him or her. My YSCC is my choice and pride.

5. Please call. I can send a student from one of our Kenyan universities, They are wonderful students.

6. Good job. Blessings. We have Jumuiyas in the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania at the Main Campus and Mabibo Hostel. I am from Kowak Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania and was a leader and coordinator of YSCCs while an undergraduate student at the university.

7. YSCCs are very important and lay a strong Christian foundation for the youth, more so in colleges and universities where there are many challenges. Youth get to share their problems and also try and get solutions. Youth pray together, read the Bible together and above all have team building activities that strengthen their bonds. Father Joe Healey remains a focused missionary in matters concerning YSCCs and has laid a good foundation in Africa where most of the youth now recognize him as *kijana wa zamani/mzee kijana*.

8. What a great idea! May this time be blessed!

9. I am very happy for the Encounter you made us know here. I wish I will be able to attend some of these events in future.

New Book to follow up Pope Francis' *The Joy of Love* on family and marriage:

Daily Companion for Married Couples by Allan Wright

Catholic Book Publishing Corp.: 2016

192 Pages

Price: \$8.95

Order from Amazon

Daily meditations to help support the relationships of both engaged and married couples. Good for prayer and discussion in our SCCs.

To the members of our St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC, here are some reflections on "The Good Samaritan" (*Luke 10:25-37*) -- the Gospel for 10 July, 2016:

Themes of love, compassion and service to others. There are many creative opportunities for a Bible Play. Children and youth can do a role play on this parable during a SCC meeting or workshop. The short Scripture DVD music video "Who Is My Neighbor" (5:57 minutes in the Parables Alive! Series produced by Paulines Africa Books and Audiovisuals) can be played during a SCC meeting or workshop followed by discussion. This music video retells the classic Good Samaritan story in a contemporary African setting and context. It tells the story of "The Good Muslim" who is a porter at the railway station in Nairobi, Kenya and has a powerful message about overcoming stereotypes and divisions to show love to people who are different from us. This is one of the many contemporary adaptations of the famous Bible parable in an African context.

From part of "Being a Christian in the XXI Century," a manifesto of the Moviment de Professionals Catòlics de Barcelona (MPCB), on its 25th anniversary (February, 2016):

WE SHARE

Our dreams, hopes and sufferings in small groups that help us appreciate our own lives; there are groups in which we share the faith to grow both humanly and spiritually, groups where we can feel listened to, accepted, comforted through our losses and appreciated beyond professional, economic or social success criteria. Groups that form a movement that offers spaces for personal growth, prayer and reflection together with other movements of the pastoral of the workers, cities and country, and with the young, adults and professionals from other dioceses and countries.

At the AMECEA Plenary Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya in July, 2011, Cardinal Polycarp Pengo, Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, pointed out that one of the drawbacks for the solidarity of the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa is that many Catholics on the grassroots do not easily see the link between AMECEA (that comes across as a big organization of Catholic bishops at the top) and the SCCs on the local level. He said: "In five years to come, I would like that AMECEA gets known to the faithful and that they realize it is their responsibility, and not just an institution of the bishops." *Seed* 23: 8-9 (August-September 2011), p. 9.

Now five years later what is the reality? Has there been a change/a shift in thinking, attitude and "ownership?"

One concrete way for SCC members in Africa to participate in the higher church levels is to pray for the SECAM 17th Plenary Assembly to take place in Luanda, Angola from 18-25 July, 2016. The Plenary Theme is: "The Family in Africa, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow in the Light of the Gospel."

As a "Prayer Corner" may this SCCs Facebook Page encourage all people to pray for a "cease fire as soon as possible" in South Sudan.

From Father Jim Ferry, MM: "Here is an update on SCCs in the Philippines. Under the leadership of Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle of Manila, the Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) -- the common name -- are very strong. They are pastoral and parish-based. A newer version is more of an NGO style."

Pax Christi International invites SCCs members to pray for peace in Africa especially on Fridays. This is very timely as the African Union and SECAM are having their continental meetings this week of 18 July, 2016.

From the *Tablet* Magazine (23 July, 2016): "For Pope Francis evangelization is less about the big events and more effective in Small Communities and Movements -- with people rolling their sleeves up to serve the poor and marginalized."

"The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) at Georgetown University, Washington, DC, USA conducted research on how to invite young adults to participate in Small Faith Communities in the United States. One respondent said: "If I had this answer I would be the most famous person in the world."

Let us pray for and with the encounter of Pope Francis and the Catholic youth of the world during the World Youth Day (WYD) in Poland this week. As we pray for and with the

1 and 1/2 million young people at the WYD, let us also pray for the spiritual journey of the billions of youth who are not there.”

“New Book:

Orobator, Agbonkhanmeghe E. (ed.), *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016. Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2016.

Part One: “The Francis Effect and the Church in Africa.”

Part Two: “Critique of Theological Methodology and Ecclesial Practice.”

Part Three: “A Church that Goes Forth with Boldness and Creativity.”

Africa continues to experience great religious ferment, not only in the enormous growth of Christianity over the past century but also in the robust intellectual output of African theologians and pastoral agents all over the continent. This volume brings together Africa’s theological elders with new and emerging voices to bring analysis and reflection on what John L. Allen Jr. has called “the most dynamic corner of the Christian map.” The volume is a treasure for anyone with an interest in theological reflection from an African perspective, and a necessary resource for theologians, scholars and pastoral agents working in a church that is steadily moving its center to the Global South.

Order from:

Amazon https://www.facebook.com/l.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.amazon.com%2FChurch-We-Want-African-Catholics%2Fdp%2F1626982031%2Fref%3Dsr_1_1%3F%3Dbooks%26ie%3DUTF8%26qid%3D1469731962%26sr%3D1-1%26keywords%3DOrobator&h=uAQFpR9KTAQEOVnQbS7KGuwxSx2SW0TneEJNbgKlws01oIA&enc=AZM48Bggiw95NSvLrXUX7hulemvSALh9wV3Sh8EpitvDTozkWgc32whPsjviZcHvy0mcFsMPD3Z4ahT3UqlMx5WpNYq44ixRdhqlqDHDtSbZ9uDqwGRq-zbrXdmWUnS8vspqg2pCyRG14gEo56R-oxlstZVAM0e8n8T7iwAE8UgyUF_Yh4YIIbfllkk9ZiJ6lrHzvnDaPNTtV4EKnMfGB5E&s=1

Paperback: \$35

Ebook: \$28.50

Kindle Ebook: \$15.39 (as of 3 January, 2017)

https://www.amazon.com/Church-We-Want-African-Catholics/dp/1626982031/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1469731962&sr=1-1&keywords=Orobator

Featuring essays from a broad range of contributors this book is a treasure for anyone interested in theological reflection from an African perspective and is a necessary resource for theologians and scholars working in a church that is steadily moving its center to the Global South.

Orbis Books

Paperback: \$35

<http://www.orbisbooks.com/the-church-we-want.html>

Acton Publishers

Paperback: Price \$18

<http://www.acton.co.ke/indexframeset.php?region=int>

Includes a chapter “Beyond Vatican II: Imaging the Catholic Church of Nairobi I” by Joseph G. Healey, Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved 23 July, 2016, <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../s.../pdf/TCCRSA.pdf>. Includes a section on “From the Perspective of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa.”

For a very good example of applying the Sunday Gospel to our everyday life (specifically to young people today), see Pope Francis’ homily at the closing mass of World Youth Day in Krakow, Poland in August, 2016. <http://whispersintheloggia.blogspot.co.ke>

Excellent website with many SCC Resources:

Office of Evangelization, Small Christian Communities and Adult Faith Formation, Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida, USA
<http://dosp.org/evangelization>

Spirit FM’s Annual Women’s Conference - 2016 Conference Brochure Spirit FM’s Catholic Women’s Conference Saturday, September 24, 2016 St. Lawrence Catholic Church/Higgins Hall 5225 N. Himes Ave. Tampa, FL 33614 Register Here DOSP Small Christian Community efforts mentioned in *America* article.

“The Christian Churches in Seoul, Korea have Small Communities for special ministries:

North Korean defectors.
Ecumenical.
Migrant workers.”

“A recent report from Santa Clara University in California, USA says that weekly Christian Life Communities (CLCs) are the most important program in campus ministry at the university. There are about 400 students in the CLCs.”

Please pray for:

Monday, 15 August to Saturday, 10 September, 2016:
Lumko East Africa SCCs Workshop, Nairobi, Kenya
Lumko East Africa SCCs Workshop (Waumini Pastoral Programme)
Theme: “Towards Communion of Communities”
Mary Ward Centre
Nairobi, Kenya
Monday, 15 August to Saturday, 10 September, 2016

The Lumko East Africa SCCs Workshop in Mary Ward Center in Nairobi is going on well with six nationalities represented: Kenya, Tanzania, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Italy and South Sudan... I wish the guidance of Holy Spirit for the workshop facilitators and wonderful time for all the participants. I was there last year with many East African brothers and sisters. Really enjoyed it, but I will miss this year...Great to have four participants from Eritrea -- four religious sisters involved in pastoral ministry in four different dioceses. May they carry the flame of SCCs back to their home country.

From the 2013 *Pastoral Plan* of Lansing Diocese, Michigan, USA:

I would like our Department of Formation to provide more opportunities for improving the quality of our homilies for both priests and deacons. In addition, I urge all priests and deacons to become part of some homily preparation session, perhaps with other clergy or with some parishioners, which would meet weekly, or at least regularly, to study, pray over and reflect upon the upcoming Sunday readings.

The 2016 *Follow-up Report* stated:

There was a strong push to promote small discipleship groups. We really cannot be disciples alone. For many, the parish may seem too big, and that can create a sense of anonymity. We need the support, challenge and accountability that small groups can provide in order for us to follow Christ more closely. Thanks be to God, these groups have been sprouting up all across the diocese with reports of many lives changed!⁹³²

Congratulations to Paul Makau and Mercy Maita on their Catholic sacramental marriage today in St. Austin's Parish, Nairobi, Kenya on 21 August, 2016. Now in our St. Kizito SCC we ask: "Who is next?"

Hailu Adalo in South Africa replied: "I wish to be a next year Sacrament of Marriage-bound receiver. Therefore, I humbly ask you to support me in your prayers as SCC members because I am a single person and our group's Marriage Preparation Trainer since 2007. I had prepared more than 20 Couples for Sacramental Marriage in South Africa as an evangelist in the Catholic Church. I am hoping to get married in plan of Lord and your spiritual and social assistance. 'Holy Family Jesus, Mary and Joseph pray for us!'"

Updated website of the National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities (NAPRC): <http://naprc.net/>

"Ordinary People Connecting Life and Faith on a Regular Basis."

NAPRC is a National Alliance of Parishes committed to a new vision of parish life that is based on the purpose of building an atmosphere in which ordinary people help each other regularly to connect their faith and life in all that they do. Indeed, we seek to build parish communities through which people...

[See More](#)



NAPRC - National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities
NAPRC.NET

⁹³² [Lansing Diocese](https://www.dioceseoflansing.org), Michigan, USA Website: <https://www.dioceseoflansing.org>

The "2016 Catholic College Guide" in the September, 2016 issue of the *Catholic Digest* features the Faith Dimension of campus ministry programs in 20 Catholic universities and colleges in the USA including:

Assumption College: discussion groups
 Catholic University of America: small community groups
 University of Dayton: Small Faith Communities
 Belmont Abbey College: men and women's households
 University of San Francisco: Communities of Reflection (CORE) --modeled after the Christian Life Communities (CLCs)

A new essay has been added to the [Academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu) website:

"Beyond Vatican II: Imagining the Catholic Church of Nairobi I."
https://www.academia.edu/.../Beyond_Vatican_II_Imagining_the_...

An essay in the book Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator (ed.), *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016 and Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2016. This essay treats: 1. "Be Bold and Creative"...
 ACADEMIA.EDU

Toolkit for Small Faith-sharing Groups on College Campuses in the USA

The Catholic Campus Ministry Association (CCMA)'s Member Services and Formation and Education Committees are pleased to bring you a toolkit to assist in the planning and execution of Small Faith-sharing Groups on College Campuses in the USA. The toolkit will provide useful information and suggested steps to planning gatherings, resources to use during small group sharing and more! Please contact the CCMA National Office at info@ccmanet.org if you have any resources, articles or best practices to share.
 Website: <http://www.ccmanet.org>

"Universities and colleges in most places of the world are beginning their Fall Academic Semesters (roughly September to December). Students are joining weekly College Students Small Christian Communities, Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) and Small Faith-sharing Communities. At the Saint Thomas More Chapel and Center at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut, USA the format includes:

"Prepare for each weekly session in a prayerful way. Pause for three minutes and offer a prayer of openness and gratitude before leaving a place and going to your SCC. Approach your SCC reverently and not just as the next activity to attend."

"New Book:

Azetsop, Jacqueline (ed.), *HIV & AIDS in Africa: Christian Reflection, Public Health, Social Transformation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016.

Contains Seven Parts.

This comprehensive look by African scholars at the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Africa features contributions from noted scholars from across the continent, offering analysis from theological, sociological, ecclesiological, and public health perspectives. It is a valuable resource for social analysis and theological reflection from an African perspective, something badly needed for theologians and academics alike.

Order from:

Amazon

Paperback: \$24.96 (as of 3 January, 2017)

Ebook: \$28.50

Kindle Ebook: price fluctuates

https://www.amazon.com/HIV-AIDS-Africa-Reflec.../.../ref=sr_1_1...

Orbis Books

Paperback: \$35

<http://www.orbisbooks.com/hiv-and-aids-in-africa.html>

Includes a chapter “Small Christian Communities as Agents of Change in the Fight against HIV and AIDS in Eastern Africa” by Joseph G. Healey, Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved 1 September, 2016, http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../.../scc_targets.pdf

Today there are over 180,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the Catholic Church in the nine AMECEA countries in Eastern Africa that have some kind of planned practical action, service and pastoral, social and mission outreach to local problems and challenges such as people with HIV and AIDS. SCC members are important agents of change and transformation in the fight against HIV and AIDS.”

Vote in the New POLL September-October, 2016:

The best part of my Small Christian Community is:

1. Best way to smell the sheep.
2. Parish-based Small Faith-sharing Group.
3. Cell-based (SCCs) student movement.
4. Young adult peer group Small Faith-sharing Group.
5. Lectionary-based Catholic.

Go to: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/>

“An exciting pastoral vision of church for St. Matthew’s Parish in Baltimore, Maryland, USA is a “Communion of Small Christian Communities (SCCs).” This builds on the rich and diverse variety of SCCs that the parish already has (NOTE: I prefer “Communities” that is deeper and more focused than the generic “groups” that can cover everything and “Christian” that helps to give the SCC members a specific ecclesial identity) and new small communities to be formed based on the parishioners’ felt needs, concerns and questions. Then the timing would be the energy of the Advent Season.”

“From the SCC Research that I have been doing this summer in the USA, leadership training is “the key” in getting a variety of active SCCs going on university and college campuses. The new leaders facilitate SCCs that start where the college student participants are at -- their passions, their felt needs, their desires, their concerns, their priorities, their interests, their questions, their styles.”

“Sunday, 18 September, 2016 is the Twenty-Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C. The Gospel reading is Luke 16:1-13. This Gospel passage ends with verse 13: “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.”

This reminds us of the African story and proverb called "Two Roads Overcame the Hyena:"

A very hungry hyena went out on the Tanzanian plains to hunt for food. He came to a branch in the bush road where the two paths veered off in different directions. He saw two goats caught in the thickets at the far end of the two different paths. With his mouth watering in anticipation, he decided that his left leg would follow the left path and his right leg the right path. As the two paths continued to veer in different directions he tried to follow them both at once. Finally he split in two. As the well-known African proverb says: *Two roads overcame the hyena.*

This is an excellent example of how an African story and proverb enriches the biblical teaching.

Alloys Nyakundi (the representative of St. Dominic SCC on the Parish Pastoral Council) writes: “September every year marks another academic year at Kenyatta University (KU) in Nairobi, Kenya. At this particular time the first year students (freshers) report to KU. They all meet in the graduation square for orientation and every church in Kenyatta University is given a chance to register its members -- our University Catholic Parish called Christ the Teacher at Kenyatta University being one of them.

After this the first year students come to our university parish church and we start registering them in our Small Christian Communities (SCCs). Every student parishioner is supposed to join and belong to one SCC. We do the registration before and after the first and second masses whereby we take the students’ names, contacts and where they stay. After the registration the Parish Pastoral Council representative of each SCC takes the names and contacts to the leaders of the respective SCCs whereby they call or text the new members and inform them where their SCC will meet (time and venue).”

From Sister Mehret Tzeggay: “Before we leave this beautiful country of Kenya on behalf of the Eritrean Catholic Church, the sisters who are pastoral coordinators and my own behalf, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the AMECEA Pastoral Coordinator and to the sponsors who made it possible for us to come and be part of the AMECEA family as we participated in the 2016 Lumko Course on “Towards Communion of Communities.” We don't know how to express it. We cannot reward your office and the donors. We assure you of our prayers so that the Lord may be the one to reward each one for the good that you have done to the Eritrean Church.”

“My two main learnings after visiting the Campus Ministry and ACE Programs at the University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana, USA from 12-19 September, 2016:

1. I have been researching a wide variety of:
 - a. Specific College Students Small Christian Communities on college campuses.

- b. Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) and Young Adult Small Christian Communities (YASCCs) in parishes.
- c. Young Professionals SCCs (parish-based or across parish lines).

Among the most interesting are **Small Intentional Living Communities** in a service project or a volunteer project (for example, Jesuit Volunteers, Focus Teams, Evangelical Catholic Teams, St. Paul's Outreach Teams, Notre Dame Alliance for Catholic Education (ACE) Program, Notre Dame Echo Program, Campus Ministry Teams, the Catholic Worker, Steubenville Campus Teams, etc.). The members live in the same physical community and share their daily lives including meals and prayer. *Bible* Reflection and Faith-sharing are regular features.

2. The starting point of the weekly meetings of most SCCs on college campuses is the students' energy, passion, felt needs, concerns, questions and way is ligr-ging, not *Bible* Sharing (for example, the Gospel of the following Sunday) or personal Faith-sharing. These come later as the students build up the trust level in their small community and are more comfortable with their spiritual identity as well as religious practices in the Catholic Church.'

Brother Bob Moriarty comments: "I have an interesting exception to report. Last night I spoke at the supper beginning this Fall, 2016 semester's SCCs at the Chapel at Yale University, USA. Bob Beloin introduced me by explicitly focusing on the SCCs approach at the chapel at Yale. He spoke specifically about their lectionary-based approach oriented to preparing students to enter more richly into the weekly celebration of Eucharist.

At his request, my own reflections about the heart of the SCC experience focused on this same theme. It was a good experience. The dining room at the Golden Center was full, and Bob mentioned to me that there could have been another 40 there as well.

A short report on the "Africa Matters" Book Discussion at Boston College, Boston, Massachusetts, USA on 20 September, 2016 on our two new Orbis books on Africa:

The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III
HIV & AIDS in Africa: Christian Reflection, Public Health, Social Transformation

With Nontando's planned Book Event in South Africa making No. 12 in our overall plan, BC is No. 3 and the first in the USA.

I use two proverbs:

*Many hands make light work.*⁹³³ Great hospitality by the Jesuits. Many people helped with African cloth decorations, Shawn bought a powerful African carving, tech people came right on time. Father Marcel was great taking photos to send to Orbis Books for the social media.

Slow but sure. About 25 participated – committed, interested people. A pleasant surprise was Sister Anne Celestine Achieng' Oyier who is on a Post-Doctorate Program here.

⁹³³ *Many hands make light work* is a common community-centered African proverb found in Haya, Tanzania and in many other languages such as *It takes many hands to capture a buffalo*. *Many cooks spoil the broth/pot* is another common African proverb found in Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa and in many other languages. These seemingly opposites show the complexity, hidden meanings, mysteriousness and illusiveness of African proverbs.

Sales: 10 of the AIDS Book. 8 of *The Church We Want*. The discussion and interchange after the presentations was excellent. Two highlights for me (I look forward Jim Keane's comments):

1. Challenges of women in Africa. The good number of African women theologians in the two books.
2. The reality that Africa does not matter to many people in the USA. What we can do to change that.

My presentation was: "African Conversational Theology: A New Way of Doing Theology." It is 9 minutes. I need to expand it to 15 minutes for the presentation at Duquesne. Go to: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../377--african-con...>



The Jesuit Institute at Boston College in Boston, Massachusetts, hosted the first AFRICA MATTERS event in the USA on Tuesday, 20 September, 2016. (L-R) Maryknoll's Father Joseph G. Healey, MM from Kenya, Sister Anne Celestine Achieng' Oyier from Kenya, Father Marcel Uwineza, SJ from Rwanda and Orbis Books editor James Keane.

Pamela Ogoi of our International Skype SCC reflects on next Sunday's Gospel:

I will still communicate to you through writing what is touching me in today's reading in the Gospel according to *Luke* chapter 17: 11-19. The theme of the reading is the "Cleansing of the Ten Lepers." Out of the ten lepers healed only one of them who was a Samaritan and a foreigner went back to thank Jesus while other nine did not. Why do you think so? When I compare this reading with the one read last week in *Luke* 9: 51-56, the Samaritans never welcomed Jesus and in today's Gospel, Jesus himself has healed a Samaritan leper who was among the ten lepers. This Samaritan who is a foreigner has gone back to Jesus to thank him for having healed him. What I am personally learning from this reading is to be thankful and sorry every time in our life because God is non-discriminative, non-tribalistic. God is loving, forgiving, merciful and is ever faithful in his work. Let us keep praying to Jesus to strengthen our faith and make us be like him. God bless all of us today and my action verse during this week will be to pray to be strong in faith together with my children. My dear brothers and sisters please do pray with/for me and my family. NOTE: The "action verse" is like a "mantra" that helps us be more aware of, and conscious of, scripture texts and their corresponding actions. Another example: "except this foreigner?"

Evangelization Prayer Intention of Pope Francis for October, 2016: "World Mission Sunday:

"That World Mission Sunday may renew within all Christian communities the joy of the Gospel and the responsibility to announce it."

Question: How are our SCCs responding? Let us reflect more closely how we SCC members express or show: our "JOY" of the Gospel and our RESPONSIBILITY to announce or proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ. We are reminded of the practical examples in Pope Francis' Apostolic Exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*. May the famous words of St. Paul resound in our hearts: "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!"

It is very appropriate that we begin this month of October with the Feast of St. Theresa of the Child Jesus who is the Patroness of Mission. Many SCCs have her as their Patroness Saint.

From Nicodemus Echessa: "All the sub parishes of Bimini Parish are now busy preparing for the welcoming of the bishop of Kakamega Diocese to open the new beautiful Khaimba Church in Mumias Sub County about 16 kilometers due west from Kakamega town. We the parishioners are looking forward to the occasion. The SCCs will present a few choirs to sing for and welcome the bishop. The vibrant bishop is new. He took over from the previous bishop (Bishop Sulumeti) one year ago."

Yesterday was a "first." With the help of Mwanajumuiya Alloys Nyakundi I used a smartphone to communicate "live" with the members of St. Dominic SCC in their weekly meeting at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya. We shared our reflections on the Gospel of next Sunday. Alloys' comment: "It was really beautiful. You really encouraged us Father Joe. We are grateful for the encouragement you gave us Father and everybody is happy about it."

From Mwanajumuia John Baptist Katembo: "I am now a committed mwanajumuia who participates in SCCs and who helps people especially youth to participate fully. I liked the SCCs Course at Tangaza last semester. Thank you for the teaching on SCCs. Thank you for the spirit. I wrote my long essay on: "SCCs as New Way of Being Church. A Challenge to the Youth of Binja Parish in DRC."

As yesterday (7 October) we celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary during this "October Month of the Rosary," we are reminded that in some SCCs the Religious Education Animator/Catechesis Animator teaches the meaning of the 20 mysteries of the rosary (the five JOYFUL MYSTERIES, the five LUMINOUS MYSTERIES, the five SORROWFUL MYSTERIES, and the five GLORIOUS MYSTERIES) especially during the months of May and October.

From Father Joe Muth in St. Matthew's Parish, Baltimore, Maryland USA: "All of you have expressed some interest in being involved in Small Christian Communities during the Advent Season. There will be a meeting next Wednesday, October 12 at 6:30 pm to begin to explore this possibility. The meeting will be in the rectory. We will have discussion, prayer, and give out some materials for your reflection. We will model how Lectionary-based Faith-sharing in a SCC works on a weekly basis. Small Christian Communities are a new way of being Church. A Burkina Faso Proverb says, "If you want to walk fast---go alone! If you want to walk far--go together!!" Hopefully during Advent we can walk together.

Small Christian Communities Meeting on Wednesday, 12 October, 2016, 6:30 pm.

A reading from the Holy Gospel according to *Luke*: 18:1-8 (preparation for Sunday, 16 October, 2016, 29th Sunday of Ordinary Time)

Jesus told his disciples a parable on the necessity of praying always and not losing heart: "Once there was a judge in a certain city who respected neither God nor people. A widow in that city kept coming to him saying, 'Give me my rights against my opponent.' For a time he refused, but finally he thought, 'I care little for God or people, but this widow is wearing me out. I am going to settle in her favor or she will end by doing me violence.' " The Lord said, "Listen to what the corrupt judge has to say. Will not God then do justice to his chosen who call out to him day and night? Will he delay long over them, do you suppose? I tell you, he will give them swift justice. But when the Son of Man comes, will he find any faith on the earth?"

The Gospel of the Lord. Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ!

Gather -- Enjoy Refreshments -- Greet One Another!!

When ready to meet -- Light a candle or play music -- Sit in silence for a moment to gather your thoughts.

Introduce yourselves with a brief sharing of any significant news in your life -- three minutes.

Read the Scripture -- then take some Quiet Time -- then someone reads the same Scripture again and each person considers a word or a phrase that speaks to them.

Quiet Time. This is followed by that sharing of their word or phrase without discussion.

Then the facilitator/leader begins with a question, or three questions, or comments for the whole group. After sufficient time, the facilitator/leader draws the session to a close with the request, 'for whom or for what shall we pray'.

The Lord's Prayer is prayed together.

Arrangements are made for the next gathering; When and where.

Final dismissal and thanks."

From Godfrey Gizamba: "I have gone around our SCC and we want to give Kshs.5000/= for the operation of your sick SCC member. Our email address is gizamba.godfree68@gmail. Can you send me your Mpesa number? I am from Catholic Diocese of Soroti Uganda. Pray for us too. God bless the ailing lady."

This is a wonderful example of SCC members helping each other: There is a

Ugandan proverb: *One hand washes the other*. SCC members in the Catholic Diocese of Soroti, Uganda taking a collection for a woman in a SCC in Nairobi, Kenya who needs an urgent operation. Also the promise of mutual prayers.

From a SCCs Course Paper at Tangaza University College, Nairobi, Kenya in April, 2016 on "Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as New Way of Being Church in Africa" by Seminarian John Baptiste Katembo:

The Small Christian Communities predated the fruit of the renewed Ecclesiology of Vatican II. The first informal small communities began to appear already in 1956 in Brazil, six years before the opening of Vatican II and in statements of the Catholic Bishops in DRC in 1961. Certainly, after Vatican II Small Christian Communities were seen all over the world as presenting an ideal way of being the church in the way the council had envisaged. They were recognized as the work of the Holy Spirit leading the members of the Catholic Church into all truth, as Christ has promised.

Marco Moerschbacher made this striking observation:

Neither from the time of the Second Vatican Council nor from Latin America comes the oldest option of a local church for what is called today Christian Base Community (see HK, December 2012, 609 ff and March 2012, 128 ff.) The oldest is rather the option of the Congolese Episcopal Conference at its plenary meeting in 1961 -- historically between the independence (1960) of the former Belgian colony and the opening of the Second Vatican Council (1962). The Brazilian church's pastoral plan with such an option dates back to 1962.⁹³⁴

"Opening Prayer and Meditation at Africa Book Event in Nairobi, Kenya"

Book Event -- Three New Books on Africa
Hekima College -- HIPSIR
Nairobi, Kenya
Saturday, 15 October, 2016

"Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit, did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant

⁹³⁴ As an example of detailed research Marco Moerschbacher writes in an email message dated 30 October, 2018: "Your question of course made me curious, and with the help of our librarian Michael Drummen (you know that they have a very good website and a sophisticated system of keywords: www.mikado-ac.info) we found out that the first Brazilian Pastoral Plan dates back to 1962, covering 1962-1965. You will find some indications in Leonardo Boff, *The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York 1986, page 3-4. Another reference would be the article of José Marins on "Basic Ecclesial Communities in Latin America," published in *Concilium* 1975 (we only have the German version). He also points to the first experiences in the 1950s which eventually led to the pastoral plan.

that by the same Holy Spirit we may be truly wise and ever enjoy His consolations, Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.”

“This morning our meditation is on African Christian Conversation Theology in the context of the Pastoral Cycle or Pastoral Circle – the experience of “See,” “Judge” and “Act.” Let us compare the process of our own pastoral experience and theological reflection in Africa with Chapter 6 of the Gospel of St. *Mark*. In verse 7 Jesus sends out the 12 disciples two by two to preach and to heal. Here we encounter the disciples’ mission experience. What is our own practical experience of missionary discipleship in Africa? (PAUSE FOR SILENT REFLECTION).

Then in verse 30 “the apostles rejoined (gathered together with) Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.” In prayer and meditation do we share our own pastoral, missionary and theological experiences with Jesus Christ? (PAUSE FOR SILENT REFLECTION). As we share our stories with each other there is active dialog and intensive listening and learning from each other – what we call “listening in conversation.”

African theologians listen to the real life stories of the African people. Stories are not just anecdotal. African Storytelling is a way of living, a way of listening, a way of being theologian. Thus real storytelling is storylistening. Creative listening is deeper than just hearing. It is listening on a more fundamental level. It internalizes our experience. We participate in a theology of listening. This involves a critical analysis of our society and the Catholic Church. Based on yesterday’s challenge to be prophetic, do we do quality critical analysis of our society and the Catholic Church? (PAUSE FOR SILENT REFLECTION).

Then in verse 31 Jesus says, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” Silence is an important part of pastoral reflection and the theological process. Do we give quality time to silence in our lives and ministry? (PAUSE FOR SILENT REFLECTION). After a period of rest, the disciples started a new action. In our pastoral activity and theologizing in Africa we participate in this same experience in the cycle of “see,” “judge,” “act” and then start a new action.

Amen.”



St. Dominic YSCC members from Kenyatta University washing clothes while doing charity work at the House of Mercy Children's Home in Nairobi, Kenya on Saturday, 15 October, 2016.



A workshop aimed at establishing a network of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa is scheduled to take place in DR Congo's capital, Kinshasa, from 20-27 October, 2016. It is being organized by Missio-Aachen and the Archdiocese of Kinshasa, under the Patronage of Laurent Cardinal Monsengwo, the Archbishop of Kinshasa. The network of SCCs to be established will provide a forum for sharing ideas, experiences, knowledge, and a wealth of relevant competences around the reality of SCCs across Africa and in the diaspora. Creating and hosting a website to facilitate the sharing of information is one of the immediate objectives of the planned workshop, a forum that will make possible the networking of the different SCCs stakeholders.

May our SCC members pray for the success of this important Pan-African Workshop. Because of visa problems the meeting was shifted from Kinshasa to Nairobi, Kenya. Certainly the "AMECEA SCCs Pastoral Model of Church" will be presented well. We will

have many good grassroots SCCs reports and a good sharing. Michael Orondo of St. Kizito SCC will represent St Austin's Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese.

One emerging type of SCC is a circle of women. South African lay woman theologian Nontando Hadebe reports: "Greetings from Lusaka, Zambia. We thank our dear FB friends for your messages and support. Our meeting is going well as we reflect on how the Zambian Chapter of the Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians can continue to be a safe space for women to share their stories as the first step in creating liberating theologians for women. Stories mediate the multiple realities of women's lives. It's wonderful to have in our midst the founding members of Circle Omega Chilufya Bula and Peggy Kabonde guiding and pushing us to go deeper in our analysis and to remember our mission -- to generate liberating theologies. Feeling inspired.

A very good Case Study of how the SCCs Facebook Page is a forum for discussion and reflection on an important SCC topic is this exchange:

1. Good Case Studies of the Pastoral Spiral are the theses and essays on the obstacle or challenge of the size of the SCC being too big -- in some cases 100-200 people/50 families. In 2016 at Tangaza University College in Nairobi one Master's Thesis in Pastoral Ministry (Meru Diocese, Kenya) and one long essay (Binga Diocese, DRC) addressed this issue. The social and cultural analysis step can dig deeper into the meaning and practice of African community life and extended families. The theological reflection step can pinpoint how a small community of Catholics in the neighborhood is an official ecclesial unit within the parish pastoral structure. The action step can divide the big community into manageable SCCs where 15-20 members participate in the weekly meetings.

2. From our experience in Lagos Archdiocese, Nigeria 15 families or 30 regular members should be the maximum. The smaller the better.

3. A big number becomes a very big challenge. Based on the example of the Small Christian Communities in Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya most SCCs have more than 100 members. If you try to divide the members, some are not ready to move out of these SCCs. Some may even stop attending SCCs that is very dangerous and a big challenge. Members are attached strongly to their specific SCCs.

Our jumuiyas are divided into smaller communities called families. Jumuiyas meet on Wednesday and families meet on the day of their choice but within the week when they read the Gospel of the following Sunday, reflect on it and try to find out how they can apply it to our daily lives. A SCC can have up to seven families according to the number of members. We find the name family comfortable since the members relate to one another as brother and sister just like what happens in a real family.

This is a good description of the "communion of communities model of church." The Larger Christian Communities of University Students (up to 100 students) like St. Dominic SCC are divided into smaller Family SCCs of 20 to 30 students. St. Dominic's has four Family SCCs: St. John Family SCC, St. Jude Family SCC, St. Maria Goretti Family SCC and St. Patrick Family SCC.



St. Francis YSCC was voted the best YSCC at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya.

4. In general we encourage a "both...and" approach. In a Catholic girls boarding school in Meru Diocese, Kenya, each dormitory has one and a half hours for its weekly meetings. So the girls meet for 45 minutes in the large community of 60 girls for announcements and general discussion. Then they meet for 45 minutes in four small communities of 15 girls each for Bible Sharing, Bible Reflection and Faith-sharing on the Gospel of the following Sunday. The guiding principal is: both...and.

6. We are reminded of Christopher Mwoleka's insight that SCCs are "communities with a human face," that is, members sit around in a small enough circle that they can see one another and share together. See Agatha Radoli (ed.), "The Local Church with a Human Face," Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, Spearhead 140-141, 1996.

6. This example reinforces our latest research: In general, we are weak on "evaluation" and "follow-up."

I am Msgr. Tsepo Tsalong from the South African Diocese of Mthatha under Bishop Sithembele Sipuka. The previous two parishes that I worked at had 29 SCCs respectively. In the present one I have 14. We are in the process of forming the 15th one. They are working and meeting in prayer life as SCCs. There is still a big challenge of meeting on their own without the priest intervention or encouragement. But the our diocese see the fruits of the SCCs.

From Ben Wanjala, one of the leaders of our St. Kizito SCC:

"It was a great day for me and St. Kizito SCC of Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya to host guests from different parts of the world on Sunday 23/10/2016 among them Fr. Noel Mpati from DRC, Sister Josée Ngalula from DRC, Michael Meyer from Germany, Fr. Alfred Chaima from Malawi, Fr. Charles

Odira from KCCB, Kenya, Fr. Justin Matepa from Zambia, Fr. Vincent from Kenya and Bishop Method Kilaini from Tanzania among many others. We are in solidarity with fellow Small Christian Communities in Kenya and around the globe. We can be stronger and more united today and into the future thereby absorbing new members that the next generations can be proud of. We thank Michael Orondo for representing St. Austin's Parish at this SCCs Networking Meeting and organizing this trip to St. Kizito SCC. St. Agatha Joy Women's Training and Tailoring Group, the women's group in St. Kizito SCC that has a sewing club, sold beautiful African shirts and bags to the visitors.



Participants in the Pan-African Meeting on SCCs Networking in Nairobi, Kenya in October, 2016

From Mwanajumuiya Rita Ishengoma Damu Damu in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: "You mentioned the meeting of SCCs Networking, I should like to know how it works so that in this time I can do something. My SCC is St. John the Baptist and I am the Mlezi wa Wazee na Wastaafu wa Mt. Augustin."

“Tomorrow, Friday, 28 October, 2016, we join with all SCCs whose Patron Saint is St. Simon or St. Jude, Apostles. St. Jude Thaddeus Small Christian Community (SCC) in the Mwisenge Juu section of the St. Augustine Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania started in 1986. It is a parish-based Small Christian Community with a pastoral focus. After a great deal of discussion St. Jude Thaddeus was chosen as the Patron of this SCC to emphasize its apostolic spirit and the desire to help the neediest (the lost causes). I was an active member in this SCC from 1986 to 1994 and still stay in communication.”

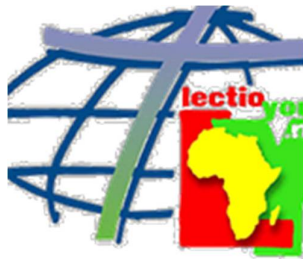
“Great to visit St. Patrick Family SCC, part of St. Dominic's SCC at Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya during their Fun Day. Prayers for their election of new student leaders.”

“An important new initiative for our Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) in both parishes (like the YSCCs in Dondora Parish in Nairobi) and in universities/colleges (like the YSCCs in Kenyatta University in Nairobi):

I would like to notify you about a new biblical initiative for Africa and Madagascar. It is a program called LectioYouth. This is an initiative of the Catholic Biblical Federation, but developed by the SVDs from AFRAM. At the moment it will be available in English and French, with the Portuguese version expected soon.

The program, intended primarily but not exclusively for the youth provides materials for forming and running local *Bible* Study Groups and Reflection Groups [like YSCCs]. These will be available online (www.lectioyouth.net), on Facebook, and also through a smartphone app. I believe it has great potential for expanding our biblical outreach because it has many unique and useful features. The approach is quite innovative (see the attached Information sheet). This new initiative offers a new possibility to focus and reinvigorate our biblical apostolate.

Please familiarize yourself with the program through the attached information sheet and website, and advertise it to whomever and wherever you wish. I will inform you when the website becomes active, which will be November 21, with materials for the 1st Sunday of Advent.



Coming Soon
LECTIOYOUTH.NET

Monday, 14 November, 2016 to Thursday, 17 November, 2016: SCCs Workshop on “Formation and Training of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Leaders in Meru Diocese.” St. Michael Retreat Centre Meru, Kenya.

One of the main topics is how to divide the larger Christian communities of up to 100 people. One pastoral solution is to have a Mother SCC that includes all the Christians that

meets monthly or quarterly for social activities and mutual support. Then create smaller, "Children SCCs" or "Branch SCCs" of 15 to 20 regular, active members that meet once a week for *Bible* Sharing and *Bible* Reflection. This relates to the metaphor/analogy is the Mother Tree that has different branches.

Comments on this pastoral challenge are welcome:

- The so-called Mother SCC can include a community of small clans and extended families spread over a larger area. But the so-called Child SCC or the "Branch" SCC are just those Catholics living next to each other and within walking distance of each other.
- That is very important formation! *Hongera* to all members. St. Kizito is praying for you.
- May the pastoral solution in Meru Diocese on dividing the larger Christian Communities into smaller SCCs ("communities with a human face") help other dioceses that face the same challenge.
- All the best. Hope you bring people closer and reach out to one another.

Today we are having an Online Skype SCCs Workshop for the Maryknoll Lay Missioners (MLMers) in their Orientation Program. We are connecting: Maryknoll, New York, USA; San Salvador, El Salvador; and Nairobi, Kenya. During this Maryknoll Lay Missioner Orientation Program Workshop at Maryknoll, New York, USA Maryknoll Lay Missioner Rick Dixon spoke from San Salvador, El Salvador about the base communities in Central America, Sister Esther Walioba, MM spoke about SCCs in Tanzania (especially the SCCs in the University of Dar es Salaam) and I shared the SCCs Website the SCCs and Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya. A young American couple with two daughters are going to serve in Mwanza, Tanzania.

Please pray for:

SCCs Membership Workshop/Meeting (like a Recruitment Workshop)
 Consolata Shrine Community
 Nairobi, Kenya
 Sunday, 13 November 2016
 Starting with the Mass at 9 a.m. and going to 1 p.m.

The workshop itself at Consolata Shrine Parish, Nairobi started at 10:30 am and ended with lunch at 1:00 pm. The facilitators were Mwanajumuiya Father [Joseph G. Healey](#), Mwanajumuiya Francis Njuguna and Mwanajumuiya [Alloys Nyakundi](#). The main aim of the workshop was to welcome new members and orient them and ground them well about the importance and activities of the Small Christian Communities.

This workshop/meeting began by asking the 30 newcomers what are their expectations. Why do they want to join a SCC? What are their felt needs, desires, hopes, interests, questions? Some answers: "To share their Catholic faith with other Catholics." "To learn about the *Bible*." "The socializing aspect." "Being part of a family community." We talked about the importance of being "Lectionary Catholics" or "Gospel Catholics" who

follow closely the Catholic Church's Liturgical Cycle and every week read and reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday.

We also learnt about the importance and the need of all Christians in a parish to belong to a SCC. Consolata Shrine has seven SCCs and the new members joined the existing SCCs according to how suitable and convenient it is for them to make it to their weekly meetings. New SCCs will start according to the need. One challenge facing Consolata Shrine is that some SCCs do not meet on a weekly basis but twice a month. This is problematic. For example, a SCC would meet on Ascension Sunday, but not the following Sunday that is Pentecost Sunday, the second most important liturgical feast of the year. But after the formation concerning the importance of being Lectionary Catholics and Lectionary *Jumuiyas*, all the *Jumuiyas* promised to try to meet every week.⁹³⁵ Wanajumuiya oyee!!!



Joe Healey speaking at SCCs Workshop at Consolata Shrine Community

“The Synod of Bishops Office in Rome has been revising the Preparatory Document (*Lineamenta*) that includes a questionnaire for the Fifteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops to take place in Rome in October, 2018 on “Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment.” In the usual way, this document will be submitted to the episcopal conferences and the synods of the *sui iuris* Oriental Catholic Churches so that it can be transmitted to the dioceses and other ecclesial institutions.

⁹³⁵ On Sunday, 28 May, 2017 we had a follow-up SCCs workshop (now planned for every six months). Two SCCs came up with this creative pastoral solution to meet weekly and reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday: twice a month (every two weeks) they would meet physically to reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday. Twice a month (the alternating two weeks) they would have a 30-minute Conference Call called “Share the Gospel” to reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday.

Father Charles Odira from the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) Commission for Pastoral and Lay Apostolate reports: "I have already notified the youth leaders and chaplains and pastoral coordinators." This is a special time for our Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) in Kenya (both in parishes and in universities and colleges) to be involved. This is also a great opportunity to share the experience of the Catholic Church in Kenya with the rest of the world."

From Alloys Nyakundi in Kenya: "How we can use social media to sensitize the world about SCCs -- the importance of SCCs and the need of belonging to SCCs? Am planning to look for forums in KU TV, KU FM and our local radio stations where most of the people in the rural areas are active participants. Check out Citizen Radio and also visit SCCs and take videos during their meetings to know what they are doing at the grassroots level."

Please give your comments, suggestions and examples."

Mike St. Pierre reports: "We have a monthly Faith-sharing (Lectionary-based) meeting on Saturday mornings after the 8 am Mass. Laity run the meetings and it lasts about 45 minutes. We meet at the Shrine of St. Joseph in Sterling, New Jersey, USA that is sponsored by the Missionary Servants of the Most Holy Trinity. Last month we had a young priest, just ordained, who sat in on the meeting. He found it very helpful for his own Sunday homily preparation in hearing the perspectives of laity.

"Reflection for Second Sunday of Advent (4 December, 2016):

Another way of being a lectionary-based Catholic is to choose a particular person in the *Bible*, or more specifically in the Sunday Gospel, to be your companion during the week. Say that on Monday in the First Week of Advent you read the Gospel of the following Sunday (Second Sunday of Advent). You choose John the Baptist to be your companion (and conversely you are his companion). For the next six days you walk with him (and conversely he walks with you). By Sunday you have gotten to know him much better and he leads you into themes of preparation, repentance and simple lifestyle of the Advent Season. Your participation in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration is deeper and richer."

"During this week we commemorate World AIDS Day (1 December, 2016). See: Healey, Joseph, "Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as Agents of Change in the Fight Against HIV and AIDS in Eastern Africa," African Jesuit AIDS Network, Nairobi: Published Paper, 17 pages, 2015. Published in Jacquineau Azetsop, "HIV and AIDS in Africa: Theological Reflection, Public Health Crises, and Social Transformation," Orbis Books, 2016. Go to: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../311-small-christ...>

"Reflection for Third Sunday of Advent (11 December, 2016):

"Another way of being a lectionary-based Catholic is to choose a particular person in the *Bible*, or more specifically in the Sunday Readings, to be your companion during the week. Say that on Monday in the Second Week of Advent you read the First Reading of the following Sunday (Third Sunday of Advent). You choose the Prophet Isaiah (a Hebrew prophet who was believed to have lived about 700 years before the birth of Jesus Christ. Born in Jerusalem, Israel, he was said to have found his calling as a prophet when he saw a vision in the year of King Uzziah's death. Isaiah prophesized the coming of the Messiah Jesus Christ) to be your companion (and conversely you are his companion). For the next six days you walk with him (and conversely he walks with you). By Sunday you have gotten to know

Isaiah much better and he inspires you through the theme of “joyful hope” in his writings during this Advent Season. Your participation in the Sunday Eucharistic Celebration is deeper and richer.”

Here are comments and feedback:

“To choose a saint from the *Bible* for the week is a new method for me but can be helpful. Thank you. I going to start doing so.”

“This is a better way of reflecting on the Sunday gospel.”

“I will give this method a trial. I already use it to think of my Patron saint. I suggest people should know theirs. My Patron saint is St John, the beloved disciple.”

“I read this message in an email. We had a SCC meeting this morning and I used some of the sharing from this message.”

“Your suggestion is a good one. We should all have a personal and spiritual relationship with our Patron Saint (our Name Saint). I am suggesting something in addition to that. That is, to identify with specific saints following the Catholic Church's Liturgical Year and the *Bible* Readings. Like now during this season of Advent.”

“Another important person in the *Bible* and the Lectionary Readings during this Advent Season is the Blessed Virgin Mary with the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on 8 December and the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe on 12 December. Our Hispanic/Latino CEBs will be especially participating in the second feast.”

“Research indicates that many people use email and social media to receive, read and reflect on the Scripture Readings of the following Sunday: through Email Mailing Lists, List-serve, What'sApp small communities, Skype Sessions, *Bible* Study small communities, weekly reflections from various religious institutions and organizations, sample homilies, homily notes, etc.”

“FEEDBACK ON MANUAL TRAINING HANDBOOK FOR CIVIC EDUCATION IN KENYA. One correspondent writes: ‘This is a great initiative, Joachim. I hope the SCCs in Kenya will use it. I am proposing that our St. Kizito SCC facilitate a “Workshop on Civic Education” at St. Austin’s Parish, Nairobi, Kenya – similar to what we did at the last election.’ Yesterday I presented the paper during our AGM meeting for clergy of Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya to priests to use it as a tool for civic education in preparation to next year’s elections, particularly from the SCCs level to the parish level.”

”Some highlights of the Orbis Books Advisory Committee Meeting that took place at Maryknoll, New York, USA on 13-14 December, 2016:

1. We discussed at length how to attract the millennial generation of young adults (18 –35) to participate more actively in the Catholic Church. A young adult woman was quoted: “As a seeker I dissent and doubt, and that’s a good thing. It is something to be embraced.” Like many in her generation she seeks out small communities “because they give me the freedom to be myself.”

2. It was mentioned that a Senior Maryknoll priest who is retired in Los Altos, California, USA, and who served for many years in Latin America, praised and was touched by selections from the new Orbis Book *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III* (available in Eastern Africa in the Acton Publishers African Edition). He regards the articles in the book as a template for Catholic Church reform beyond Africa. The book refers to the importance of SCCs.

3. In the spirit of the collaborative, collegial and synodal style of our African Conversational Theology there is a well-known Burkina Faso Proverb that is also very popular in Western countries: "If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together."

Here are some reflections for the Fourth Sunday of Advent (18 December, 2016):

Another way of being a lectionary-based Catholic or Gospel-based Catholic is to choose a particular person in the *Bible*, or more specifically in the Sunday Readings, to be your companion during the week. Say that on Monday in the Third Week of Advent you read the Gospel of the following Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Advent). You choose Joseph, the fiancé of Mary and specifically the mantra: "he decided to divorce her quietly." In my pastoral ministry in Eastern Africa I have encountered painful cases like this one of Joseph and Mary's engagement and the aftermath. For the next six days let us walk with Joseph (and conversely invite him to walk with us). By Sunday we have gotten to know Joseph much better and he inspires us through the themes of accompaniment, faithfulness, honor and compassion during this Advent Season. Our participation in the Sunday Eucharistic celebration is deeper and richer.

Here are some reflections for Christmas Day (Sunday, 25 December, 2016):

Another way of being a lectionary-based Catholic or Gospel-based Catholic is to choose a particular person in the *Bible*, or more specifically in the Sunday Readings, to be our companion during the week. Say that on Monday of this Fourth Week of Advent we read the Gospel of the following Sunday (Christmas Day). We read Luke 2:1-20 that tells the story of the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem. We choose a shepherd and specifically the mantra: "The shepherds went in haste to Bethlehem." For the next six days let us walk with this shepherd (and conversely invite this shepherd to walk with us). Luke associates the birth of Jesus with shepherds, poor people, members of a despised trade just as he will do later with prostitutes and other sinners. These disadvantaged people have seen the light. Our take away this Christmas is to reach out to the people that Pope Francis calls "the marginalized and those on the periphery of society" such as undocumented immigrants.

The "Preface" of the Spring, 2017 issue of *Quest* (A Reflection Booklet for Small Christian Communities) begins: "'If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together.' This slice of African proverbial wisdom captures an insight that is all the more meaningful when we reflect on it with the eyes of faith."

Calendar of Events:

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Course. Tangaza University College, Nairobi, Kenya. 12 January, 2017 to 23 March, 2017.

Two Credit Core Course “Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today” (PTC418). Thursdays 8:30 a.m. to 11:25 a.m. Tangaza University College (CUEA), Nairobi, Kenya.

Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Course. Hekima University College, Nairobi, Kenya. 18 January, 2017 to 22 March, 2017.

One Credit Elective Course “Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today” (THE1410). Wednesdays 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Hekima University College (CUEA), Nairobi, Kenya.

If you are looking for a nice African Christmas Story for your SCC here is:

"This African Mary Understands My Swahili Prayers"

Theme: Prayer

Sub Theme: Christmas, Inculturation, Inspiration, Mary

Author/City/Country: Mrs. Perpetua Mashelle // Tanzania

Genre/Type: Prayer

Locale: Tanzania

Publication Information: *African Stories For Preachers and Teachers* (Paulines Publications Africa, 2005)

Story Text:

It was the week before Christmas in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and a Tanzanian mother was reminding her young daughter Bahati about the Christmas story. She took a Christmas card of a European painting of the birth of Jesus Christ from the table in their sitting room and said: "Bahati, here you can see Mary, Joseph and the new born child Jesus. And there are the shepherds and the animals in the manger." Bahati nodded happily. Her mother went on: "If you pray to Mary, the mother of Jesus, she will always help you." But suddenly Bahati frowned and said in a sad voice: "But I don't think this foreign Mary -- this *Mzungu* (Swahili for foreigner) Mary -- will understand my Swahili prayers."

Bahati's mother was taken aback and said: "Oh!" Then Bahati's mother went over to the table, picked up another Christmas card and said: "Maybe you'll like this one better." It was a painting by a well-known Tanzanian artist that portrayed the scene of Jesus Christ's birth in an African setting. The cave or stable in Bethlehem had become an African hut with a thatched roof. Several sheep nuzzled the straw that the baby Jesus lay on. The African Mary sat quietly receiving gifts of maize meal, milk, oil to shine her baby and firewood from her neighbors. Joseph sat attentively off to the side. A single chicken wandered around in the background. Bahati's mother sat waiting. Suddenly Bahati's face glowed with a big smile and she cried out: "Oh, yes! I'm sure this African Mary understands my Swahili prayers."

"The Lobinger Model:" The Lobinger Model is an innovative model rooted in the particular needs and talents of local communities. It addresses the theological conundrum presented by the priest shortage by expanding the role of lay leaders and ordaining them into service. The Lobinger model was developed by Bishop Fritz Lobinger who, early on, was

instrumental in developing the pastoral model of the Small Christian Communities -- including a particular model of *Bible* study with central roles for lay leadership in liturgical services, catechesis and the social gospel. He ministered in regions of South Africa where there were few priests. He recognized the enormous faith and talents of lay people in the communities under his care and sought to empower them to carry out the fullness of sacramental life in their community. You can learn more about his model by reading his interview at <http://www.uscatholic.org/ordainelders>

In preparation for the 3rd international meeting of priest associations and reform groups in October, 2017 Father Wolfgang Gamer offers his view of the Lobinger model based on his experience as a priest in South America. His model is based on the one advanced by Bishop Fritz Lobinger and the Vienna pastoral theologian Paul Zulehner of “Paul priests (originating outside the community, i.e. ordained by the bishop)” and “Corinth priests (originating within the community—recognized and chosen from within the community).” Gamer notes that in *Romans* 16 and 1 *Corinthians* 16 the apostle Paul offers a variety of leadership roles that are exercised in Rome and Corinth.

To begin, each community opens itself to that Spirit, prayerfully reflects on its situation and sets priorities in order to live out their faith in today’s world. In order to be a community of mission, they spell out their activities under the guidelines of worship, service and witness. In this process, the community is accompanied and supported by “Paul priests” and full time lay people who assist in the discovery of charisms within the community. The aim of this process is to build a team of “Corinth priests” of at least three persons. Lobinger and Zulehner speak of *virī probatī* and eventually also of *feminae probatae*. Women and men, both single or married and couples, like Prisca and Aquilla in *Acts of the Apostles*, provide a robust model for missionary outreach and community leadership and ministry. From this process emerges a team of leaders, accepted and supported by all members of a community, whatever their size or number. This team may well undergo formation and will eventually be ordained for service. Source: https://www.amazon.com/Like-His-Brothers-SistersOrdaining/dp/0824518500/ref=asap_bc?ie=UTF8

“May the new year of 2017 bring many blessings and much fruit to the SCCs around the world especially in promoting peace, justice and equality.”

“I am writing from the Military Vicariate of Nairobi, Kahawa Garrison, St. Charles Lwanga Catholic Church. We beg the Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team to kindly help us to find a wheel chair for a member whose two legs were amputated. We visit rarely this Facebook Page. We raised some money but not enough too purchase the wheel chair. Cpr. Joseph Olenkaiya, Chairman, St. Lucy SCC.”

From Venture Danitez: A MESSAGE OF PEACE

Fellow members of our Small Christian Communities in Kenya, we've started a new year and we are the drivers of our own vehicle and that vehicle is Kenya. This is a year of elections and I beseech you dear ones to help me preach peace. Speak loudly and boldly against divisive politics, champion for peace and uphold brotherhood and sisterhood. Preaching peace countrywide and worldwide is one way in which "The Church in the Move" (Small Christian Communities) continue with its evangelization mission. I plead you to listen to this...

You are a Luo and I am a KIKUYU. She is a Luhya and he is a Kalenjin. Uhuru is the President, Raila the opposition leader, Ruto the Deputy President while Wetangula is the Minority Leader. By their standards, you are poor and I am poor. Each one of them is wealthy. They call each other "brother." Every time they meet, they hug. According to them, we have many things in common -- Poverty, Ignorance, Stupidity, Blind Fanaticism, Short Memory and are willing slaves.

The fact that I come from the president's turf does not make me better than you. Neither does coming from opposition region make you worse than me. We all face insecurity, corruption, unemployment and we all feel the pinch in the rise of cost of living. When we seriously fall ill, our families have no choice but to choose between death or going bankrupt. Whether in Nyeri, Kisumu, Machakos, Eldoret or Busia, most families are struggling to choose between paying school fees or going to bed half hungry. We all struggle to survive regardless of our so called tribes or our Tribal Kings. And when elections come, they incite us against one another. When the fighting starts, they get protection from state securities and police. Others hire private security to guard their homes and families, while at the same time they hire thugs and militias to kill us. Look back at 2007 - 2008 Post Election violence!!!

The sad truth is that when Waiguru loots NYS, she doesn't do it for Kikuyus or the average person from Kirinyaga County. When a Bruce Odhiambo loots youth, he doesn't do it for Luos or jobless youth from the Nyalenda Slums in Kisumu. When a Muthama is accused of grabbing land, he doesn't share his spoils with landless squatters from Ukambani. When a Wetangula's hand is oiled with "BAT" Money, an average Mfula in Bungoma doesn't get a dime. When a William Ruto grabs 100 acres of land in Eldoret, the average Kipyego doesn't get even an inch.

DEAR KENYANS, WAKE UP! Folks, these guys are in bed together. You don't believe it?? Check this one out!! In 2007 Raila, Ruto and Duale were in the same camp. Likewise, Uhuru, Wetangula and Kalonzo were in the other. Come 2013, Uhuru, Ruto and Duale were on one side while Raila, Kalonzo and Wetangula were on the other.

SO WHAT CHANGED????? The day we start thinking beyond our tribes, we shall make this country a better place, where there is no room for *Mtu Wetu*. Friends, it starts with you and me. It is time for you and me to start hugging and thinking together as "Kenyans" and not as "Tribes." WHEN SOMEONE FROM YOUR TRIBE IS ELECTED AS THE NEXT PRESIDENT YOU WILL GAIN NOTHING OTHER THAN EMPTY TRIBAL FAME. UPHOLD PEACE.

"I am Monica from St. Mary SCC, Dagretti Corner Parish. I greet you all members of SCCs in Jesus' name. I kindly request you to join me and other SCCs to help the family of Gladys who has a problem of her 16 year old girl who was one of victims of the Naivasha Accident. Two of her daughters burned to ashes, but this girl survived and we thank God. They want her to pay a bill of 85,000/=. Our priest has given 15,000/=, we St. Mary SCC has given 15,000/=, other SCCs have given 15,000/=, friends have given 5,000/=. Now balance

remaining is 35,000/=. Kindly my good Christians, please stand with me plz and save this poor young girl please. May God bless you all. Happy New Year 2017. M.C.N.

The free, online Ebook "Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa" has been revised and updated to 859 pages including:

1. A new chapter: "Tracking the Growth of Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs)."
2. APPENDIX: 25 Online E-Resource Materials on the On-going Formation and Training of Small Christian Community (SCC) Members
3. "Select Annotated Bibliography of Books, Booklets, Articles, Reports and Printed Materials" (348 entries)
4. "DVD/Video/Audio-Visual Resources" (47 entries)
5. "Internet Resources/Websites/E-Resources" (89 entries)

The direct hyperlink to the full Ebook is:

http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../pdf/Build_new.pdf

Small Christian Communities

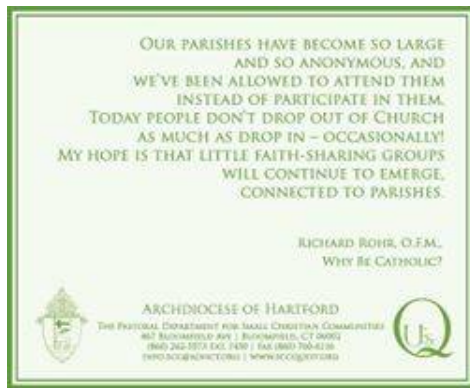
"offer a pastoral model of church integrally connected to the structures, ministries, and activities of the parish. This helps local Catholics feel that 'they are the church' and more responsible for church life and decision making...."

Joseph Healey, M.M.
The Church We Want, p. 197.

Archdiocese of Hartford
The Pastoral Department for Small Christian Communities
467 Bloomfield Ave | Bloomfield, CT 06002
(860) 242-5573 Ext. 7450 | Fax (860) 760-6116
info.scc@aohct.org | www.sccquest.org



Jennifer Ehrentraut, Joe Healey and Teresia Mdesoma at 50 Jubilee Mass



From Alloys Nyakundi: “This was a joint SCC meeting at Kenyatta University that happens at the start of every semester. Members of all the nine Youth Small Christian Communities came together before. We had prayers and Gospel Sharing together. I was also given a chance to talk about our Youth Small Christian Communities.”



Alloys Nyakundi speaking at Kenyatta University on YSCCs

Important for SCCs:

From *The Tablet* (7 January, 2017): "Pope Francis' reforms should not be seen as personal projects, but a continuation and revitalization of the reform movement that began with the Second Vatican Council. The Catholic Church, Francis explains, is an inverted pyramid, with the People of God at the top and its priests and bishops, including the Pope, below: a church that sees leadership as service, that engages in a dialog with the world and offers it the medicine of mercy."

Today in Nairobi, Kenya I had a very interesting conversation with Father Marcos Muino, SJ, an Argentinian Jesuit priest who is presently doing research on SCCs in Eastern Africa. I showed him our SCCs Website and articles on Latin America.

We compared the:

"Small Christian Communities Model of Church." This has a very specific meaning and context in Eastern Africa. Although the term "Small Christian Communities" is used in many different ways, as a "new model of church" it specifically refers to pastoral, parish-based SCCs (usually small neighborhood communities) being part of the official structure, leadership, ministry and life of the parish. SCCs are a pastoral, parish-based model that helps to build the parish structure. The parish is a communion or network of SCCs within a "communion of communities" Ecclesiology. SCCs are the central "place" of ecclesial identity, ecclesial life, ministry and mission. In recent years a shift has occurred in Eastern Africa where much more of the ecclesial life takes place in the SCC not in the outstation church or parish church, for example, the celebration of the sacraments, religious education, catechesis and other ministerial and service activities.

and the

"New Ecclesial Movements Model of Church." A phenomenon of the past 75 years is the new ecclesial movements that have seen rapid growth and influence worldwide. Examples are the Neocatechumenal Way, Focolare, Opus Dei, etc. Note their strong influence in Argentina. They have energized many dying and inactive parishes, pastoral situations and Christian communities. They have successfully taken responsibility for running parishes (especially in Europe). But in certain situations they have become divisive in the local parish community. In other situations they have taken energy away from the parish rather than feeding energy into it. The great challenge is to coordinate the new movements with, and within, parish life. They appeal more to the elite (wealth and education). Also they have a more inductive style, top-down style.

"Eritrea SCCs Update: After finishing the Lumko Course in Nairobi from 15 August to 10 September, 2016, the four Eritrean Comboni Sisters returned to promote SCCs in their country. Sister Mehret Tzeggzai writes asking for our prayers. She is the Coordinator of the National Pastoral Department. They are presently restructuring the existing SCCs in Eritrea."

On the occasion of the death on 8 January, 2017 of English Bishop Colin Davies, MHM the former bishop of Ngong Diocese, Kenya and one of the founding fathers of SCCs in the AMECEA countries, I wrote these "Four Personal Vignettes of Marehemu Bishop Colin Davies, MHM:"

1. In the 1970s when I needed a weekend break from the busy activities of the AMECEA Bishops' Office in Nairobi, Bishop Davies would invite me to his Ngong Residence. I would walk the Ngong Hills and then have English high tea and pleasant conversation with the bishop. The teapot was covered with a "cozy" (a new English word for me that referred to a knitted covering made by his Mother).

2. In helping the bishop on research on the Second Vatican Council for his books and talks, he pulled out these very little precious black notebooks with the notes he made on the spot during the Third and Fourth Sessions of the Second Vatican Council in Rome in 1964-65. He commented on the bishops and theologians (like Congar and Chenu) that inspired him and the hardliner Roman Curial folks that didn't want change. He was amazed that all the bishops from all over the world signed some of the final documents in the hall on the last full day of the council – 7 December, 1965.

3. Sister Rachel Butler, the Assistant Librarian at Tangaza University College in Nairobi and I drove out to his Ngong Residence where we selected books, magazines and printed materials from Bishop Davies' personal library to donate to the Tangaza Library. These materials represented 60 years of his pastoral life and reading in East Africa. Some of these materials related to SCCs.

4. In his final years in Nairobi, Kenya we had long conversations on the future of the Catholic Church. I was inspired by Davies' prophetic vision of the option of married priests into the Roman Rite for "pastoral reasons." He wrote a challenging article "A Call to Action on Eucharistic Hunger – Now! Making the Eucharist Available to All Baptized People as the Bread of Eternal Life." He saw married priests as a pastoral solution to providing Mass and the Eucharist to all SCCs members.

At the Memorial Mass for Bishop Davies in Ngong, Kenya on 20 January, 2017 I read this tribute:

It is an honor to Ngong Diocese, to the Kenya Bishops Conference and to the AMECEA Region that Marehemu Bishop Colin Davies, MHM participated in the Third and Fourth Sessions of the Second Vatican Council in Rome in 1964-65. He was one of the dozen original Vatican II participants that concelebrated with Pope Benedict XVI at the 50th Anniversary Mass of the Second Vatican Council in St. Peter's Square at the Vatican on 11 October, 2012. Bishop Davies' little precious black personal pocket diaries with the notes he made on the spot during the council are an historical treasure.

“The members of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Course at Hekima University College, Nairobi, Kenya formed a SCC and chose St. Mother Teresa and St. Paul the Apostle as their co-Patrons.”

From Urbanus Munywoki: “Small Christian Communities are the avenues for God revealing himself anew to people in a more personal way. Where everyone sees the other as a brother and a sister. A communion among the people of God. In one faith, baptism, in love and unity. Sharing and celebrating their joys and happiness.”

From Nancy Njehia: “*Wanajumuia* hoyee!! Yesterday we had a meeting with five *wanajumuias* from Kenyatta University where we deliberated on forming a group to reignite the YSCCs in high schools and dioceses where they have been dormant over time. Requesting for your prayers so that all our plans will be successful.”

“In our SCCs Course at Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya, the Tea Break was a unique opportunity to show how SCCs are a “new way of being church.” Rather than drink coffee or tea in the Faculty Lounge (with mainly priests), the two visiting priest presenters from Meru Diocese had tea and a friendly discussion with the student seminarians in the canteen.”

May our SCCs members participate in the following:

“Communication from the Nairobi, Kenya Archdiocesan Family Life Office:

To all Priests in Parishes and Chaplaincies,

This is to bring to your attention that the World Marriage Day (WMD) this year will be celebrated on 12 February, 2017. This is a day that is celebrated on the 2nd Sunday of February every year worldwide. The theme for this day will be "Love One Another." This phrase is the commandment given us by Jesus in *John 15:12*.

We request that you organize so that all married couples can renew their marriage commitment to one another during mass in your parish. We urge the priests to organize so that the couples animate the mass that day and also if possible to renew their marriage vows.”

From Father Febian Pikiti, a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team, presently living in Zambia: "We have a busy parish program and SCCs are part of our weekly visitation around the main Parish Centre. We have in our program training for Church Councils represented by leaders in SCCs. But this we can only do after the rain season in April."

Very sad public announcement from the Hartford Archdiocesan Communications Office in Connecticut, USA:

“After 25+ years of support from the Archdiocese of Hartford, the Pastoral Department for Small Christian Communities will cease operations on March 31, 2017. In the meantime, the office will continue to fill orders for spring ‘17 *Quest* through the first weeks of Lent. Further editions of *Quest* and "Summer Reflections" will not be produced by the archdiocese. Existing unfulfilled subscriptions will be refunded in a timely manner. Continuing support for small communities in the archdiocese will be managed by parishes at the local level.

Started by Archbishop John F. Whealon, our Pastoral Department for Small Christian Communities has ably and enthusiastically promoted and supported small church communities in many parishes of the archdiocese through visits, informational evenings, training workshops, retreats and many other Faith-sharing initiatives. To augment these activities, the department has produced publications and support materials, management resources, and booklets. However, today *Quest* and print materials like it are in direct competition with digital formats and internet platforms, which are readily available.

Under the leadership of Director Brother Robert Moriarty, S.M., we greatly appreciate the many years of service that the Pastoral Department for Small Christian Communities has dedicated to parishes in the Archdiocese of Hartford, and are grateful for all the lives and hearts it has touched through its dedicated work and outreach.”

From Moses Muriira: “Today I had one of the best SCC gatherings (name of Patron Saint is St. Nicholas in my parish of St Peter and Paul Parish, Meru Diocese, Kenya. Elderly and illiterate men and women gave the best *Bible* Sharing ever. I used the Buzz Method as taught in our class at Tangaza by Mwanajumuyia Padri Joe Healey. Everyone seems to enjoy this method. Please try it. It works well. SCC is the best way to go. Truly a new way of being the church.”

During our weekly SCC Gospel Sharing in Kibarani, Kibwezi (Diocese of Machakos) Kenya yesterday we had the step:

"Mention a word, phrase or image in the Gospel that strikes you the most/resonates with you the most/stands out to you the most."

I mentioned one word -- "must" -- when Jesus says, "your light must shine before others." Today my homily is on: “Yes, you can make a difference in the church and Kenyan society.” How do we shine our light in specific situations and contexts in our daily life?

From various Kenyatta University students in Nairibi, Kwenya: “Listening to Kenyatta University Catholic show#kufm. Our brother Alloys Nyakundi is representing us well @kufm by enlightening our colleagues around Kenyatta University about the meaning and importance of Small Christian Communities. That was awesome teaching by Mwanajumuiya. Have learnt about the importance of SCCs in the Catholic Church. I mean that SCCs have a lot to contribute. We have learned how important the SCCs are because they prepare us for the readings of the coming Sunday. Thus one is able to internalize the message before it is further elaborated by the priest in his homily on the Sunday. SCCs are central to the growth of the church as an entity. Encompassing members through different age levels. Have learned of Basic Ecclesial Community as a name of SCC. Types of small Christian Communities.”

“Prayers, please, for the:

Meeting of the AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team

2:30 p.m., Wednesday, 8 February 2017

AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa) Secretariat
49 Gitanga Road
Nairobi, Kenya

This is the first meeting of the team that has 15 members: 14 Africans (nine from Kenya, two from Zambia, one from Malawi and one from Tanzania), and one expatriate missionary based in Eastern Africa. There are six laymen, three laywomen, five priests and one religious sister.”



Members of the AMECEA Small Christian Communities Training Team at the AMECEA Secretariat in Nairobi, Kenya.

“Now available for 150/= Kenyan Shillings (\$1.50) is the printed version of the:

Preparatory Document for the Synod of Bishops XV Ordinary General Assembly. "Youth, Faith and Vocational Discernment," Liberia Editrice Vaticana and Paulines Publications Africa, 2017.

The electronic version is available on the Vatican Website:

<http://press.vatican.va/.../pubbl.../2017/01/13/0021/00050.html...>



Documento Preparatorio della XV Assemblea Generale Ordinaria del Sinodo dei Vescovi sul tema “I giovani, la fede e il discernimento vocazionale”

PRESS.VATICAN.VA

“10 people participated in the first Meeting of the AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team at the AMECEA Secretariat on 8 February 2017 in Nairobi, Kenya on 8 February 2017. There were five laymen, three priests, one laywoman and one religious sister. We discussed SCCs training especially the latest draft of the new booklet *Strengthening the Growth of Small Christian Communities in Africa -- A Training Handbook for Facilitators* and designing online SCCs Webinars.”

From Chishimba Chishimba: “It is so great to see how social media such as What'sApp has enhanced communication in my SCC. Everyday a member of my SCC – St. Maximilian Kolbe of the Cathedral of the Child Jesus Parish in Lusaka, Zambia -- shares daily *Bible* readings and reflections that help us all to pray even when we seem to be too busy to do so. I therefore urge everyone to make good use of social media to enhance SCCs.”



Alloys Nyakundi on Kenyatta University FM.

“Theme: God within people’s reality.

Good afternoon, friends of this page on Small Christian Communities. My name is Edu Revollo and I am a Comboni seminarian studying in the SCCs Class at Tangaza University College in Nairobi.

I come from Peru in Latin America and what I would like to share is an experience that I had in my country about the Small Christian Communities (that we call in Spanish *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base* -- CEBs). It happened in one of the villages of my country within the Amazon jungle, specifically in the native community called “Nomatsiguenga” in the province of Pangoa. This community is called “Sonomoro.”

I went to this village for around two months as a part of my missionary experience during my long holidays and I was sent to a community to do my missionary service for those months. I was very happy and animated to share my faith and to be a witness of what God has done into my life. When I reached the place I was amazed to know that since a long time there was no presence of priests, sisters or religious people. I mean, the priests who usually go there, go rarely because of the size of the territory and the lack of priests and religious.

However when I started visiting the families I met a group of people who told me that they usually meet to share the Word of God. I was surprised when they told me that because I thought that they would not have any meeting or sharing around the Word of God. But it was just the opposite because, despite of the lack of religious and priests in that native area, the people kept alive their faith in the sharing of the Word of God in their daily life in their Small Christian Community.

I participated during those two months with them actively and I could see how they used to meet to share the Word of God, to discuss different issues concerning to the village and to do concrete actions in order to help one another in their village. During those months I was an observer and I learned many things from them: community life, pious prayers, collaboration, etc. I also learned that the Small Christian Community is a really blessed and sacred space for the Christians where they can be actively listeners to what God speaks to them through their own reality and in practical ways how to apply those teachings. Definitely, I would never forget that experience of Small Christian Community in Sonomoro. As an evangelizer, I was evangelized by them and surely they taught me that GOD IS FULLY PRESENT AND WITHIN THEM!



Edu Revollo with the Sonomoro SCC in Peru.

From Chishimba Chishimba: “You may have people in your family who feel isolated or excluded. Reach out to them. Think about that terminally ill uncle who never makes it to family gatherings or that aunt in a nursing home whom nobody visits. Think about your grandson or nephew who isn’t going to church anymore and just moved in with his girlfriend. Go and visit them. Spend time with them if you can; or reach across the distance, and send them an email. Jesus wants to touch them. You can make a difference!” “Lord, help me to reach out to those who feel like outsiders. Help me show them your love and mercy.”

Genesis 2:18-25

Psalms 128:1-5



Mwanajumuiya Joe Healey's Celebration of his Golden Jubilee of Missionary Priesthood at the AMECEA Secretariat in Nairobi, Kenya on 8 February, 2017.

A revised, updated version of the free, online book -- Joseph Healey, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* – is available on the SCCs Website at:

http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../pdf/Build_new.pdf

It includes new SCCs material from Kenyatta University, the AMECEA Pastoral Department and our SCCs Courses at Tangaza and Hekima in Nairobi. What I have discovered is that this free, online Ebook version actually helps to sell the print version. As I travel around giving SCCs Courses and Workshops I teach online using the Ebook. I refer to the print version and continue to sell copies. For example, 14 copies recently in Meru Diocese. Copies to the seminarians in my Tangaza and Hekima Courses in Nairobi. This is why I ordered 100 more copies recently. I am reminded of the Ugandan proverb, *one hand washes the other*.

You are invited to an African Inculturated "Small Christian Community Mass" ("Jumuiya Mass") on Wednesday, 15 February, 2017

12 Noon
 Wednesday, 15 February, 2017
 Hekima University College
 Joseph Kang'ethe Road, off Ngong Road
 Nairobi, Kenya

Wednesday of the Sixth Week of Ordinary Time -- Year A.
 Special features:

1. Shared Homily (in buzz groups of two each).
2. Spontaneous "Prayer of the Faithful" starting from our everyday local experience.
3. African Exchange of Peace using a sign of peace from Zimbabwe.



KU Reigniters of YSCCs Team planning their presentations.

Dear Fr. Joseph Healey and the entire Small Christian Communities Training Team of Eastern Africa.

We thank you for the Small Christian Communities Facebook Page that I visit on behalf of Saint Stephen SCC and the faithful of the Catholic Diocese of Lodwar, Saint Catherine of Siena Catholic Church.

We are making a humanitarian request both to the public and all well wishers here in Turkana where hunger has struck everywhere both human and animals. Worse than last year with 10 to 15 daily dying of hunger. We set up as a community to reach out to our dear ones who are dying in different places.

We set the ball rolling starting in January. We tried to raise money and bought 300 bags of maize and 100 bags of beans. We need to have a grinding machine for maize meal at a cost of KSHS 230,000/=. We have 150,000/= raised among our communities. We are less 80,000/=. Kindly help Saint Stephen SCC to reach out to the needy.

“May our YSCC members respond to:

The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales is to gather the views of thousands of young people on the future of the Catholic Church through a mobile phone app. The app will be launched at the Flame Congress on 11 March, 2017 in Wembley Arena, London, and will be one of the ways that young people will be consulted ahead of the forthcoming Synod on “Young People” due to be held in Rome in October, 2018.”



Representatives of the YSCCs in Dandora Parish, Nairobi presenting in our SCCs Class.

Additional hyperlinks to access the free, online Ebook *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*:

1. African SCCs Networking Website. Go to: Right hand sidebar >Quick Links>Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa at: <http://africansccsnetworking.org/>

2. AMECEA Pastoral Department Website. Go to: top menu bar>Small Christians Communities> Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa at: www.ameceapastoral.amecea.org
Or

3. AMECEA Pastoral Department Website. Go to: Right hand sidebar>More news> Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa at: www.ameceapastoral.amecea.org

“We have serious drought and hunger in Kenya. A friend from the USA gave a gift to our SCCs Fund (*Mfuko wa Jumuiya*) that is coordinated by our AMECEA SCCs Training Team. So far we have helped seven SCCs with 20,000/= (\$200) each in seven different dioceses in Northern and Eastern Kenya: Eldoret, Garissa, Isiolo, Lodwar, Malindi, Maralal and Marsabit. Five SCCs bought maize meal and maize (corn) and one SCC contributed to buying a Grinding Machine. Prayers please.”

An example of how this SCCs Facebook Page can be a forum for analysis, conversation, discussion and exchange. The first post was:

“Pope Francis encourages us to discuss and respectfully debate the pastoral issues in the Catholic Church. So in our SCCs Classes in Nairobi we wrestling with: Difference between a SCC Model of Church and a Small Apostolic Group (including solidarities and

parish associations) Model of Church. Difference between a Small Christian Community (Jumuiya Mass) celebrated in a home or in the neighborhood and a regular parish-style mass celebrated in a home or in the neighborhood. Comments on this Facebook Page are welcome.”

Then the comments included:

“SCCs are a new way of being the church and they are very different from other smaller groups in the church. When we are having a Small Christian Community mass the lay people should be given a chance to give their reflections on the gospel and also take a lion’s share in most of the activities taking place and not the priest.”

“On 12 April, 2016 we had a one day SCCs Coordinators Workshop on “Finding Pastoral Solutions to the Ongoing Challenges in the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Meru Diocese” at the St. Michael Retreat Centre, Meru, Kenya. A “Critical Incident” was Catechist Samson’s report on his visit to a friend in Thika Town in Nairobi Archdiocese. He happened to participate in a Home Mass/House Mass of the Small Christian Community (SCC) of his friend. But this was not really a SCC Mass (Jumuiya Mass). The mass was exactly the same mass that the priest celebrates in the parish or outstation church. The priest preached and there was very little lay participation. In SCC classes, workshops, meetings and discussions this issue comes up again and again. There is a big difference between a specific SCC Mass (Jumuiya Mass) celebrated in a home or in the neighborhood and a regular mass celebrated in a home or in the neighborhood.”

“The Small Christian Communities can collaborate with other groups in the parish.”

“Wow nice teaching here! I have not seen this happen in my home parish. I will carry the gospel home.”

During a talk at the AOSK Seminar on “Community Life” in Nyeri, Kenya on 25 February, 2017 Fr. John Bosco Odongo, CM said:

We have to be patient with each other, forgiving, supporting, and refraining from judging each other. We can practice this so easily when we have Small Christian Communities in our local houses, regional houses and even provincial structures. It will ease our work and mission. We will be bold and creative, missionaries like the Son of God, and truly live as the first Small Christian Communities in *Acts of the Apostles* did. *Acts 2:42-47* is a model of community life: Importance of witness of life, praying together, breaking of the bread (sharing what we have), Eucharist. We have to live as Small Christian Communities. Working together, praying together, sharing life just as the first Christian communities. We ought to love and share the Word of God in the smaller units in our communities -- Small Christian Communities in our own larger communities.

Today we have many Small Christian Communities in Africa, especially here in Eastern Africa, for example, St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC (this is a worldwide SCC; we are all welcome to join). At Tassia Parish in Nairobi, Kenya we have a good number of SCCs, for example St. John Bosco SCC, St. Stephen SCC, St. John the Baptist SCC, St. Ann SCC, Holy Family SCC, among others. These SCCs offer good examples

to this new way of life. In Christ the King Major Seminary in Nyeri, Kenya masses, evaluations, etc. are done in terms of Small Christian Communities. We thank God for the SCC member, Father Joseph Healey, a Maryknoll Priest and Lecturer on Small Christian Community at Tangaza University College, who has worked hard to form many people into an awareness of the significance of SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES AS A NEW WAY OF BEING CHURCH.

“Good evening *wanajumuiyas*, I, Armand Mayumbu Maku with my brothers and sisters *wanajumuiyas* in the *Jumuiya* of St. Padri Pio, St Monica Parish, Kitengela, Machakos Diocese.”



A Presentation on “Small Christian Communities as An Approach to New Evangelization” by Sr. Mary Nzilani at the 19th Interdisciplinary Theological Session at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA).

“We have visited the Small Christian Community Facebook Page and posted our request. Kindly help us buy at least 100 bags of maize (corn) for members who are dying after a recent tribal war that has displaced a number of people and for those suffering through the drought in Baringo.

St. Anne SCC-----10,000/=
 St. Joseph Catholic Parish-----10,000/=
 Other SCCs-----10,000/=
 Total collections-----30,000/=
 Request-----70,000/=

Thanking you in advance.
 Chairman Cornelius Arap
 Catholic Diocese of Eldoret

Food for thought for SCCs members during Lent. “Do you read the *Bible* as often as you check your cellphone?” Pope Francis asks.

On the first Sunday of Lent, Pope Francis said if we want to fight against the temptation of sin, we must be familiar with the Word of God – treating the *Bible* more like how we treat our cellphone. “During the forty days of Lent, as Christians we are called to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and address the spiritual battle against evil with the power of the Word of God,” he said on March 5. “For this you have to become familiar with the *Bible*, read it often, meditate on it, assimilate it.” “Someone said: “What would happen if we treated the *Bible* like we treat our cellphone? If we always carried it with us; or at least the small pocket-sized Gospel, what would happen?” Pope Francis spoke to pilgrims before leading the Angelus in St. Peter’s Square, drawing a stark comparison between the attention we give our cellphones and the attention we give Scripture, for example, always taking it with us, and going back if we forget it at home. “You forget your mobile phone – oh! I do not have it, I go back to look for it. If only you read the messages of God contained in the *Bible* as we read the messages of the phone...” he said. “And, please, do not forget – do not forget! – What would happen if we treated the *Bible* like we treat our cellphone. Think about this. The *Bible* can always be with us, close to us!”

“Below the parish level Vatican documents and Pope Francis himself use the term ‘family communities’ that can be understood in different senses including Small Christian Communities (SCCs).

In commenting on contemporary USA in his book *Strangers in a Strange Land: Living the Catholic Faith in a Post-Christian World*, American Archbishop Charles Chaput of Philadelphia Archdiocese states:

It’s really going to be the family that’s going to be the primary tool that God will use to evangelize, beginning with their children of course. But then families associating together in smaller groups, support groups of one another will be very important in the future as well. As parishes are supposed to be, but they’re institutions now rather than support groups. Secondly, find ways for those families to network in some circumstances, for instance in a parish, right?

Charles Chaput in John Allen, "Philly's Chaput on a Post-Christian Culture, 'Amoris', and More," CRUX, 2 March, 2017, CRUX Website, retrieved 5 March, 2017, <https://cruxnow.com/.../phillys-chaput-post-christian-culture...>

Chaput's analysis is right, but he doesn't go far enough. These small support groups could be dynamic SCCs in the parish that are a "communion of families." Then the parish becomes a "communion of SCCs."

From Ian Freestone in Australia:

"For over 20 years I have been leading the 'Ruach' Network of House Churches based in Australia. BCCs /SCCs have been significant in informing my own ministry. I am presently studying/writing on 'animation' as a model of leadership and am trying to find resources that would help in presenting a theology of animation -- a concept that is more understood in Catholic expression than Protestant Evangelicalism (my own background). I am familiar with 'animator'/'animation' because of my adult education background and the role of action research (especially in the 80s and 90s), but it is not a model that has found traction or usage in the Protestant West (as far as I am aware). I think it is a term that well describes the role of House Church leaders and I think it could be given a much broader application in Protestantism."

In an interview in the March, 2017 issue of *The Catholic Mirror*, Bishop Rodrigo Mejia, SJ states:

1. In describing the growth of the Catholic Church in Kenya: "Small Christian Communities (SCCs) have been given a priority and every parish has established SCCs."
2. From its beginning in 1988 the Kenyan Lenten Campaign helped a lot in the establishment of SCCs and to create an awareness on issues of justice and peace.
3. "My book in Swahili on SCCs -- *Kanisa la Kimazingira* -- consists of real experiences in parishes."

As we read the "signs of the times," new types of Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) emerge on college campuses. The Aquinas Institute, the Catholic Campus Ministry at Princeton University, New Jersey, USA has developed the Joan of Arc Ministry that is a welcoming and confidential space to openly discuss the intersections of Catholic faith, sexuality and gender identity. All are welcome!

From Sister Rita Ishengoma, STH in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: "After my trip to Nairobi I had organized a seminar here. First I met the parish priest, the chairperson of the parish and the sisters of the three religious congregations in Kisarawe Parish. Five SCCs members attended as well as one priest and four sisters. I used the objects like the ones in the SCCs Course in Tangaza and added a *jembe* 😊 (= the *Bible*). This process will be on going until we animate the new way of sharing the WORD OF GOD in our parish."

Felista Vuyanzi is a dedicated SCC member in Nairobi, Kenya. In this

month's "Poll:" "The best part of my Small Christian Community is:" ... she answered: "Prayer, reflection and Faith-sharing grounds me." She comments: "On Sunday the priests gives a ten minute homily on the Scripture Readings. In the middle of the week in our SCC we spend a half hour sharing our reflections on the same Scripture readings and connect them to our faith and life. The sharing of our SCC members is very rich indeed."

Today, the Third Sunday of Lent, has the theme "Environmental Conservation and Protection" in the 2017 Kenyan Lenten Campaign. In the context of the present drought and famine especially in Northern Kenya and the Gospel of St. John on "water," one Reflection Question is: "How are we, as Small Christian Communities, concerned about the environment?"

I have a tradition at the end of each SCCs Course in all our Nairobi colleges of posting the "Final Annotated Syllabus" (with hyperlinks) on our SCCs Website (<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>) as a permanent, retrievable record of the course.

Hekima University College

Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA)

Nairobi, Kenya

Final Annotated Syllabus of One Credit Elective Course, Two hours per week for seven weeks, Lecture Format, Pastorally Oriented (January to March, 2017).

Wednesdays 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. in Seminar Room 1.

"Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today" (THE1410)

The PDF version of is available at:

<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../412-final-annota...>

or

http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../final_syllabus_c...

Any comments and updates are welcome.



SCCs Class at Hekima University College, Nairobi, Kenya.

“Three quarters of the seminarians in my SCCs Classes in Nairobi, Kenya do not know the full meaning of the acronym AMECEA. Do you?”

At the AMECEA Plenary Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya in July, 2011, Cardinal Polycarp Pengo, Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, pointed out that one of the drawbacks for the solidarity of the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa is that many Catholics on the grassroots do not easily see the link between AMECEA (that comes across as a big organization of Catholic bishops at the top) and the SCCs on the local level. He said: “In five years to come, I would like that AMECEA gets known to the faithful and that they realize it is their responsibility, and not just an institution of the bishops.” *Seed* 23: 8-9 (August-September 2011), p. 9.

“Today I spoke with a Kenyan seminarian studying in Second Theology at Hekima College, Nairobi. He visits the SCCs on Sunday afternoons in the parish where his Formation House is located. When I asked him about the Small Christian Community Masses (Jumuiya Masses) in the homes of SCC members, he said: "They are just like the Sunday Masses in the Parish Church." So sad. Why don't priests understand that "SCCs as a New Pastoral Model of Church" means that the masses in the homes in the neighborhood are different. They are more participatory and include Shared Homilies.”

Response from Alloys Nyakundi: “Priests should understand that in the *Jumuiya* Mass the lay people should take a lion share in the mass celebration unlike mass at the church where the lay people only listen to the priest. This is a great challenge and I have seen it in my rural home where the priest does not give the lay people any participatory chance in the mass.”

“Peace of our Lord be with the Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team. There's no rain at all and people and animals are starving without food and water. Kindly save us, *wanajumuiya*. I talked to the Coordinator of SCCs in Malindi Catholic Diocese and he said even his budget of SCCs is in a mess. It is empty. We have contributions on our own, but we fail to buy maize and beans for the needy. Any support you put in our way will help.

Daniel Michael Womema
Chairperson, St. Jude SCC
St. Mary's Parish
Catholic Diocese of Malindi.”

Responses:

“Blessings to you and the Eastern Africa Training Team of Small Christian Communities. We have received a helping hand of Kshs.10,000/= from a brother and a good neighbor Gizamba Godfrey from the Catholic Diocese of Soroti, Uganda. May God bless him and all who jointly united to prayerfully to reach us. I thank you Father Joseph Healey through the Small Christian Communities Facebook page. This is indeed showing solidarity in God's love and a challenge to learn and do it as Godfrey wrote *One hand washes another* so wonderfully. We still have no rains and the situation is worse despite our efforts with the Coordinator of Small Christian Communities in the Catholic of Malindi. Any contribution from the *Mfuko wa Jumuiya* will be highly appreciated.

Wishing you God's special blessings.

Daniel Micheal Womema
Chairperson, St. Jude SCC
St. Mary's Parish.

P.S. We have sent special thanks to the Catholic Diocese of Soroti in respect.”

“Thank you so much. you have a long way to go. In Nairobi we are expecting rain even as I write now we feel with you at heart we are ready to send Kshs. 5,000/= through Mpesa Please indicate the number. This is a contribution from our parishioners of St. Stephen Catholic Church, Archdiocese of Nairobi. We pray for you. Sincerely at heart. Celestine Ndwayo.”

From Mwanajumuiya Moses Muira: “I have been reading a 2002 handbook on Catholic Charismatic renewal service, and discovered that they have a section on prayer meeting. This has given me an insight about the integration of many Catholic movements. The concept of SCCs can easily be borrowed and used in other church movements. Jesus and the early church used the SCC as their centers of Evangelization. Even as we join and participate in other church movements and activities, let's not shy off bringing up the idea of the SCC.”

Response: “As an example: Right now the Kenyatta University Chaplaincy Center (KUCC) has 28 volunteer Apostolic Groups (some of which are movements in the Catholic Church). Many use a small group model of prayer and reflection similar to a SCC. Some groups have lectionary-based Faith-sharing/Gospel-based Faith-sharing.”

At a 22-25 March, 2017 conference of African Catholic leaders in Rome entitled “African Christian Theology: Memories and Mission for the 21st Century,” it was pointed out that there are 122 million Pentecostals and 110 million Evangelicals⁹³⁶ in Sub-Saharan

⁹³⁶ American priest Father Dwight Longenecker, who served as a Anglican priest before becoming a Catholic priest, points out that one of the attractions of Evangelicals is an emphasis on fellowship:

By “fellowship,” Evangelicals mean the warm, family atmosphere that their churches enjoy. Evangelical congregations tend to be smaller and to attract people from the same socioeconomic bracket. Consequently there is a strong family atmosphere. In smaller communities the congregation is often made up of an extended family or tribe. These social conditions make for a strong and sympathetic community where fellowship, loyalty and mutual caring is strong. Catholic communities, on the other hand, are usually larger, more diverse, and less focussed on fellowship. Catholics find their fellowship in smaller sub groups within a parish community. Therefore when they gather for worship it can sometimes seem impersonal and unwelcoming.

Dwight Longenecker, “The Power and Problems of Pentecostalism,” *Crux*, 31 March 2017, *Crux* Website, retrieved 1 April, 2017, <https://cruxnow.com/commentary/2017/03/31/power-problems-pentecostalism>

These “small sub groups” can be seen as SCCs.

Africa. Their combined total of 232 million outpaces the number of African Catholics at 200 million. Obiageli Nzenwa, a Nigerian Catholic lay woman and independent human resources consultant in Abuja, Nigeria, said that this Pentecostal/Evangelical boom forces the Catholic Church in Africa to “wake up.” She said that the Catholic Church has no real sense of community, and that a person can leave the congregation without being noticed. There is a lack of “deep, interpersonal relationships in the Catholic Church.” She encourages “community groupings” [a Small Christian community model] beginning with Mass and including *Bible* study, discussion of pressing issues and concluding with light refreshments.

John and Cindy Korb, former Maryknoll lay missionaries in Kitale, Kenya report on one type of SCC in the USA. In their parish in New York State they belong to a *Bible* Study Group on the *Acts of the Apostles*.

Four important AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa) quotations on SCCs:

1. The AMECEA Study Conference on “Deeper Evangelization in the Third Millennium” took place in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 2002.” Section 7 of the Pastoral Resolutions is on “Building the Church as a Family of God by Continuing to Foster and/or Revitalize the Small Christian Communities.” No. 43 states: “We recommend that a program on the theological and pastoral value of Small Christian Communities be included in the normal curriculum of the Major Seminaries and houses of formation of both men and women.” This and other recommendations were made in the context of a document on the vision of the association: “AMECEA 2002: A Holy Spirit Filled Family of God Committed to Holistic Evangelization and Integral Development.”

2. In 1990 English Bishop James Holmes-Siedle, MAfr (who died in 1995) who spent many years animating SCCs in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda was commissioned to do an evaluation of SCCs in the AMECEA Region that was published as “A Look at 17 Years of SCCs in Eastern Africa.” [1] He recommended the introduction of Mobile SCCs Training Teams to facilitate workshops and seminars on SCCs as was being done in Malawi.

[1] James Holmes-Siedle, “A Look at 17 Years of SCCs in Eastern Africa,” *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 32, No. 6 (December, 1990), pp. 359-362.

3. In conversations over the years with two Secretary Generals of the Uganda Episcopal Conference – Father Joseph Obunga and Msgr. John Kauta – both felt that the best pastoral solution for developing SCCs in Uganda was not setting up an office at the National Catholic Secretariat in Kampala, but to set up Mobile SCCs Training Teams to visit the dioceses, seminaries and pastoral centers.

4. The Online Digital Version of the book *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* states: “Here are 21 future challenges, priorities and actions for SCCs in Eastern Africa based on our in-depth critical evaluation/assessment, ongoing research and a reading of the contemporary signs of the times in Africa. They are part of the “Action/Pastoral Planning Step” of the Pastoral Spiral. No. 3 is: “Train SCC leaders/animators/facilitators/coordinators in animation, facilitation and coordination skills. Set up Mobile SCC Training Teams on the Eastern Africa, national, diocesan, deanery, parish and outstation levels. Use the mass media and the social media like the internet, radio, and TV for SCCs training programs.”

All four quotations can be found in the free, online Ebook on “SCCs in Eastern Africa” at: http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../pdf/Build_new.pdf

Father Laurenti Magesa recommends that the best papers from our SCCs Class at Hekima University College in Nairobi, Kenya should be posted on our SCCs Website. Here is:

"A New Way of Being Class: Reimagining Theological Education in Africa Today"

By Temple Anuforo, SJ

<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../pdf/reimagining.pdf>

Temple emphasizes that we need to inculturate the "method" of teaching theology using African Conversation Theology or African Palaver Theology because at the end of the day what really matters is not content but process. Then he also demonstrates very well how the content of African Christian Contextual Theology today is:

- a. Rooted in personal and community experience.
- b. Based on grassroots research and analysis.

I feel Temple breaks new ground when he gives examples of the local nitty-gritty context of African Conversation Theology or African Palaver Theology -- Connecting Classroom and Mission Ground. This relates to the “new ground” on which the theologians can stand.

Hopefully African Conversation Theology or African Palaver Theology as a distinct theological method/methodology or process will create new inculturated and contextualized African content.

We hope that this SCCs Facebook Page can be a forum for conversation, discussion, exchange, sharing and analysis. Our question today is what is the best term to use for SCCs that are over 100 persons such as at Kenyatta University and in sections of Meru Diocese, Kenya. Some suggestions: "SCCs Zone," "SCCs Cluster," "SCCs Campus," "SCCs Outstation," "Mother SCC." Add your own suggestions. NOTE: These "larger" SCCs divide into small communities of 15-20 members for *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection*.

As a "new way of being church" Small Christian Communities have a "new language." I have questions about the expression “Small Groups.” From my visits to college campuses in Eastern Africa and the USA the expression “Small Group” can be used in so many different ways and cover so many different extra-curricular activities and clubs from cooking to Yoga to politics to singing to aerobics to philosophy to evangelization. My experience is that “small community” and especially “Small Christian Community” give a specific identity and focus.



St. Dominic SCCs members meet for a photo before animating the Palm Sunday Mass at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya.

One of the choices in this month's SCC Poll (<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>) -- "Communion of Communities" Model of Church (in Swahili "ushirika wa jumuiya ndogo ndogo za Kikristo") is very important theologically and practically (pastorally). The Sunday morning mass in the parish church is the communion (union) of the different SCCs in the neighborhood (geographical area of the parish). With the focus on this Sunday morning communion, this is why it is not advisable to have separate, individual masses in the SCCs on Sunday afternoon.

From Ben Wanjala: "Today Friday, 14 April. 2017 being Good Friday we members of St. Kizito SCC, Waruku, Nairobi Kenya started the Way of the Cross from Waruku at the bridge at 8:30 a.m. heading to St. Austin Parish. On the way other members from different SCCs and the clergy and religious joined us. We reached at the parish at 12:30 p.m. where the main Way of the Cross performed by the youth started at 1:00 p.m. at the main entrance of the church to St. Mary's field. The service for Good Friday ended in the church at 5:30 p.m.

This has been a long tradition in St. Austin Parish. Members of St. Kizito SCC were joined by Wanajumuiya from St. Charles Lwanga SCC, St. Josephine Bakhita SCC, St. Peter Mwamba SCC and St. John SCC at different places along the route. Photos from past "Ways of the Cross" are found on the Photo Gallery of the SCCC Website (<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/photo-gallery.html>)



Denis Misiko of St. Charles Luanga SCC, Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya carries the cross on Good Friday during the Way of the Cross on 14/04/2017 on the way to St. Austins Church Lavington.



Grace, a member of St. Kizito SCC, Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya is baptised at the Holy Saturday Vigil at St. Austin's Church.

"My Responsibility Towards Elections 2017"

Message from the Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation Commission (JPIC) Commission of the Religious Superiors Conference of Kenya (RSCK): "Find attached a new initiative of AOSK and RSCK, entitled "My Responsibility Towards Elections 2107," that encourages and assists preparation for Kenya's upcoming August, 2017 elections. The document can be printed with one page on each side; then the sheets are to be cut in the middle. It is... hoped that religious communities, Small Christian Communities (SCCs), parishes, schools, and other organizations will print multiple copies and share them with members."

"My Responsibility Towards Elections 2107," will appear weekly until the elections. It is sent in .pdf format (rather than in MS Word .docx) to help avoid problems posed by printers that have not been set for the A4 paper sold in Kenya and most of the world. The document should print well, regardless of whether A4 paper or Letter paper (the U.S. standard, slightly wider and slightly shorter than A4) is being used.

If your device cannot open a .pdf file, it is time for a free download of Adobe Acrobat Reader . (Click on the preceding blue hyperlink.) It is usually better to untick the three options offered on the web page.

NOTE: The link to these documents have been sent to SCC members by Email.

May our SCC members be active in civic education programs in Kenya in the next four months.

“The First Reading of today's Catholic Mass (Second Sunday of Easter, Year A, 23 April, 2017) is one of the fundamental, core *New Testament* texts for SCCs:

Acts of the Apostles 2:42-47:

They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles and to the communal life, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their property and possessions and divide them among all according to each one's need. Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple area and to breaking bread in their homes. They ate their meals with exultation and sincerity of heart, praising God and enjoying favor with all the people. And every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

“We can always learn new things about SCCs in Eastern Africa. In the exam in our SCCs Course at Tangaza College in Nairobi in March, 2017 to the question:

Describe in detail three Methods of *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection/Bible--Life Connections* in SCCs in Africa. **NOTE:** Also called Lectionary-based Faith-sharing/Gospel-based Faith-sharing.

A seminarian answered: "The Mantra Method." This is when a certain verse or word or image from the Gospel Text is repeated often -- even memorized -- during the day or during the week so we can memorize it/remember it/interiorize it/appropriate it on a deeper level. He gave the example of the verse "I am the bread of life" (*John 6:35*). This is linked to the Lumko Method of repeating verses of the *Bible*. This is popular especially in rural areas of Africa where SCC members cannot read and with little children such as a PMC small community.”

Father Stephen Mbugua, the Parish Priest at St. Paul's Catholic University Chapel in Nairobi, Kenya, reports that there are 11 YSCCs in the Residence Halls of the University of Nairobi. There is a Youth Mass on Sunday at 11.30 a.m. There are two Alumni YSCCs that meet on Sunday after mass.

From Father Zakaria Kashinje, OSA in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania: “Our mother parish of Mavurunza (Immaculate Conception Parish) has 54 SCCs. Most of the members meet on Saturday Morning. In fact the thousands of SCCs in Dar e Salaam have a unique style. Most meet early (6 or 6:30 a.m. or 7 a.m.) on Saturday mornings. The men are few.”



YSCCs Workshop in Makindu Parish, Machakos Diocese, Kenya.

From Denis Misiko: “Today was a good day for us of St. Charles Lwanga SCC in Nairobi. We had time with Mwanajumuiya Padri Joseph Healey and a chance to share his birthday cake together. It was great indeed. We shared the Word of God and two of us confirmed plans for our wedding days. We are grateful for being part of this Small Christian Community.”



Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth receives the first copy of our new 80-page booklet *Strengthening the Growth of Small Christian Communities in Africa -- A Training*

Handbook for Facilitators during the official launch in Kisumu Archdiocese, Kenya in May, 2017

I begin all my talks with the words: "I am a student, I am a learner." In the last week our AMECEA Team -- members of the AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team-- learned a great deal about SCCs in Kakamega Diocese and Kisumu Archdiocese in Kenya. We encountered the " Church on the ground" that is the first choice in our May, 2017 Poll on " The best part of my Small Christian Community is:" Go to: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/>

I am Fr. Laily Fernando in Sri Lanka. I am the National Director of the Small Christian Communities Program. Our Chairman is Rt. Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Fernando. There are 12 directors for each diocese. We have four national meetings a year. Our office does several training programs for lay leaders and clergy. We are following Asian Integral Pastoral Approach to developing SCCs in Sri Lanka. This is in collaboration with Asia Bishops conferences. From 1995 we have been successful in developing a process of making a difference in the Catholic Church.

"AMECEA Strategic Pastoral Plan 2014-2024." AMECEA Pastoral Department, "Phase One -- AMECEA Pastoral Department Action Plan 2015-2018" under Objective 1: "Revitalize and utilize SCCs as modes of evangelization at the grassroots". Two goals:

1. "Train personnel to run SCCs."
2. "Develop SCCs resource materials for use by SCCs."

To implement these recommendations the AMECEA Pastoral Department has published: Chimombo, Emmanuel, Joseph G. Healey, Rita Ishengoma, Rose Musimba, Febian P. Mulenga and Alphonse C. L. Omolo, (eds.), *Strengthening the Growth of Small Christian Communities in Africa -- A Training Handbook for Facilitators*, Nairobi: AMECEA Pastoral Department and Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2017. Cost: 200/= Kenyan Shillings (or \$2) at the AMECEA Secretariat, Nairobi and at Paulines Publications Africa Bookstores.



Online learning during the SCCs Workshop at the Apostles of Jesus in Nairobi, Kenya in May, 2017.

“A recent report on revitalizing Catholic parishes in the USA in the context of discipleship development stresses the importance of small groups, or Faith-sharing groups, as highly effective in fostering an individual's spiritual development. This Support Group Model is very positive, but different from our Eastern Africa SCC model that stresses Bible Reflection connected to daily life (gospel-based Faith-sharing) and the community's development.”

“From the SCCs Archives:

Bishop Christopher Mwoleka, the deceased bishop of Rulenge Diocese, Tanzania who was the founder of SCCs in Tanzania, already saw this pastoral challenge in the 1980s when he identified the pressing need for an effective and inculturated method of Bible Reflection in Eastern Africa that goes beyond the small prayer group model. Just as Africa needs an "appropriate technology" for economic development, the Catholic Church in Africa needs an "appropriate methodology" for Bible Reflection that connects the Bible to the real issues of our daily life and includes personal and communal Faith-sharing. He called this "finding the African bait."¹

¹ Joseph Healey, “The Need for an Effective Bible Reflection Method in SCCs in Africa,” *Biblical Pastoral Bulletin*, 8 (1989), 28-29. *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)* 37/3 (May, 1995), 156-159. Another version is Joseph G. Healey, “Finding the African Bait,” *New People*, 6-9 (1990), 10-11.

“Two cases of children with disabilities who they need wheelchairs have been made from the SCCs in Meru Diocese: one from Stt. Victor SCC in Michaka Parish and one from St. John SCC in Mbaranga Parish. Kindly give your possible support from the *Mfuko wa Jumuiya* and it will be appreciated.”⁹³⁷

“We as Holy Cross Youth Dandora parish regret to announce the death of our secretary Mwanajumuiya Evelyn Nyaituga's mum which occurred last Sunday after a sudden illness the burial will be this weekend in Nyamira county please remember her family in your prayers along with the ongoing burial plans blessed evening!”

On Sunday, 28 May, 2017 we had a follow-up SCCs workshop (now planned for every six months) at Consolata Shrine Community, Nairobi, Kenya. We discussed the challenge of how to meet every week, not just twice a month. The SCCs formation focused on the importance of being Lectionary Catholics and Lectionary Jumuiyas. Two SCCs came up with this creative pastoral solution to meet weekly and reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday: twice a month (every two weeks) they would meet physically to reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday. Twice a month (the alternating every two weeks) they would have a 30-minute Conference Call called “Sharing on the Gospel” to reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday.

In traveling around Eastern Africa we realize the many challenges of internet connectivity and the difficulty of downloading large files on personal computers, in cybercafes, etc. So here is the message that you will find on our SCCs Website under Ebooks: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/eb.../47-ebooks-.html> "Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa." NOTE: This is the SCCs Website Online Version of the Double Spearhead Nos. 199-200 (2012) Book "Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of SCCs in Eastern Africa" published by AMECEA Gaba Publications -- CUEA Press in Eldoret, Kenya. This online version is updated as of 1 June, 2017. The complete book is found on the Ebooks page or by clicking "here." The book is also available as Part 1 and Part 2 for those with poor internet connection or challenges in downloading the full version. Part 1 can be downloaded by clicking "here" while Part 2 can be downloaded by clicking "here." To order the printed paperback book click "here." NOTE: On the website the words like "here" become hyperlinks and go directly to the text of the Ebook.

Responses:

1. Cyprian Binaka from Nairobi, Kenya writes: "It is a great step to have this resource on SCCs in Eastern Africa online."
2. Peter Mbuchi from Nairobi, Kenya writes: "I downloaded this latest version of the Ebook yesterday and will circulate it as an attachment to those who need it. The Ebook is an amazing narrative on SCCs in Eastern Africa as the "Church on the Move."

”One characteristic of being a lectionary-based Catholic is to choose a particular word or phrase or verse (or an image) -- called a *mantra* -- from the daily readings, and especially the Sunday readings, to use as a *Bible mantra* or prayer *mantra* or action verse during the day

⁹³⁷ Two members of St. Peter SCC in Kariokoo Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese read this message on the SCCs Facebook Page and contributed \$290 each to buy the wheelchairs.

and during the week. Such a particular word or phrase or verse from the Gospel of the following Sunday can nourish and sustain a person or a small community all day and all during the week. SCCs in Kenya call this the *nenola uhai* (Swahili for “word of life”) that is the guiding word for the entire week. Starting on Monday SCC members can prepare for their weekly *Bible Service* in their SCC in the middle of the week and for the next Sunday Mass or Sunday Service Without a Priest (led usually by the catechist). For example, next Sunday -- 11 June, 2017 -- is Most Holy Trinity Sunday. One mantra is *John 3: 16*: “God so loved the world that he gave his only Son.”

From Small Christian Communities Meru Diocese: “SCCs’ existence in the parish has gotten a wider and more holistic sense touching all aspects of parish life including social development, justice and peace priorities.”

From Lamia Etienne in Mauritius: “Hello friends! I am still grateful to have acquired knowledge and spiritual nourishment from this SCCs since I was in Tangaza. Thanks to Father JGH for this. I am happy that this model is more and more active and on the move. I have put into practice in my ministries what I have gained from the SCCs Course. Enjoy all and be blessed.”

From Rene Reid in USA: “I am the director of Catholic Church Reform Int’l based in the USA and we have a scheduled Zoom call set up with small faith communities for Saturday, June 10 from various parts of the world. So far, we are connecting an SCC (New Zealand) with an IEC (U.S.) with a small faith community in (Belgium) with a CEB in (Mexico). This will take place on Saturday, June 10 (June 11 in New Zealand) via Zoom <https://zoom.us/j/2429500175> based on various times:

We would love to connect our communities with some already involved in the “twinning” project in the SCCs in Eastern Africa. I’ve included Nairobi in the time chart hoping that you might be able to bring in one or two SCCs from your region. If you’re not familiar with Zoom, it is as simple as clicking on the link I’ve included above: <https://zoom.us/j/2429500175>. The purpose of the meeting is to introduce various small faith communities to others in various parts of the world and to give them an opportunity to share how each functions and to learn from each other. This could either be several people gathered in one room or individuals plugging into the Zoom call each from his/her own computer. We can handle up to 50 connections.

From Catholic layman Peter Mbuchi in Nairobi, Kenya who does not just “talk the talk.” He “walks the walk”: “Our Parish Priest has read and positively appraised the new booklet *Strengthening the Growth of Small Christian Communities in Africa: A Training Handbook for Facilitators*. I bought two books for each of the eight parishes within our Makadara Deanery in Nairobi Archdiocese. Each priest will get one copy and the lay person responsible for Small Christian Communities one copy. Our Parish Priest promised to insure that every Small Christian Community Coordinator within our parish will have a copy of the handbook paid for by the parish.” Oyee!

While traveling in the USA I am visiting small communities of different religious faiths and denominations such as the Pentecostal Churches and the Jehovah's Witnesses. One fact is striking: They do not have the sacrament of the Eucharist that is so important in our Catholic faith and practice. This is pertinent as we reflect on next Sunday's Gospel on the “Feast of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ.”

You are also reminded that one choice in this month's POLL on our SCCs Website is: "interfaith small communities." <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>

From Father James Mallon, a priest in Canada: "We have to rethink our models of parish life, from membership-based communities to assemblies of disciples of Jesus who proclaim and share the good news with all peoples. It is not so much that the Church of Jesus Christ has a mission, as that the mission of Jesus Christ has a Church. More and more people are convinced that the basic parish communities are at the heart of parish renewal, where parishioners are enabled to reflect in a personal way on the Word of God, on their faith and on their call to holiness and discipleship of Jesus in their daily lives at the heart of every parish there will be a community of growing, maturing believers."

Mwanajumuiya Sister Rita Ishengoma on the Gospel Reading of next Sunday (2 July, 2017): *Matthew 10:37-42*:

Verse 38: "Whoever does not take up this cross is not worthy of me." Everybody has a cross. Everybody has to know what kind of cross he/she has to carry. To carry one's cross is a must. "Those who does not take up their cross and follow in my steps are not fit to be my disciples," said Jesus. The cross is light and bearable if you take it as God planned. If you do the will of God your cross will take you, said St. Thomas a Kempis. God does not give you a cross that you are not able to carry. God has examined your cross by his eyes. He knows it. He has tried it. It fits you. By his powerful and love it does not weigh one pound more than you can carry.

We read in *Luke 9:23*: And he said to the all: If want to come with me, you must forget your self, take up your cross every day and follow me." Know your cross now.

Part of living the "SCCs Model of Church" is homilies about SCCs in our daily life. See:

Homily on the 13th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 02/07/2017
By Fr. Lawrence Murori, Diocese of Meru, Kenya

Small Christian Communities are the *loci* to practice this attitude of Jesus: hospitality and welcoming. In the Small Christian Communities' weekly meetings in the homes of Christians, we encounter several men and women of Shunem welcoming us in their homes to share the Word of God in their homestead. After the sharing of the Word of God they give us a cup of tea. Those times when I had masses in the homes of Christians I several times encountered the reality of Shunem: "Elisha, welcome."

Finally, Small Christian Communities are the places the Christians can encourage one another to take up the cross of Jesus and follow him, to be worthy of Jesus and to practice the Christian virtue of hospitality.

From Tony Llanes: "This evening I meet some leaders who begin to journey with their neighbors as a Small Christian Community. Their struggle is how to bring them all to the Catholic Church and be present and participate in all its activities. I told them to first become a good neighbor and much later they would begin to appreciate the spirit of goodness

and welcome. Then their understanding of the church would be much deeper than "churchy" activities, structures and policies.”

Comment: “This is a very good approach -- to start by living Christianity on the local level neighbor to neighbor. Thus the meaning of the choice in the Poll – ‘Church in the neighborhood.’”

As we do weekly lectionary-based Faith-sharing in our SCCs, I hope our SCCs folks are following the Catholic Church’s liturgical plan where we are systematically going through the Gospel of St. *Matthew* (Year A) chapter by chapter. My scripture mantra for the following 14th Sunday of Ordinary Time: “I will give you rest.” (*Matthew* 11:28).

With the advanced information technology there are many free, online digital tools to help you access the Bible quickly and easily. As a lectionary-based Catholic you can receive the Daily Scripture readings of Mass on your smartphone, tablet, laptop computer, desktop computer, etc. You can put an app on the front page of your home screen. You can set a timer so that the Daily Scripture readings appear on the front page of your home screen at 12 a.m. (midnight) of each new day or at the exact time that you wake up in the morning. You can receive the readings as a daily email message with a link to a webpage. Commentaries, Bible reflections, special prayers and information about the saint of the day are included.

Welcome.

"Daily Scripture-based Faith-sharing" is one choice in the July-August, 2017 POLL on "The best part of my Small Christian Community is..." Vote here: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/>

Cardinal Joseph Tobin, the Archbishop of Newark, New Jersey, USA at a Catholic Church meeting in Orlando, Florida, USA in July, 2017:

If community is so essential to a full Christian life, how can we help this happen? Can you name some ways that your parish has been able to offer real community to people? If you are already in a small community, God bless you. And I know it is very important. Perhaps it is your family. Or a special circle of friends. Or co-workers in the vineyard? Does it remain inclusive and open to others.

In discussions here in the USA I have discovered that there are at least three meanings of the expression popularized by Pope Francis: **the marginated** (17 hits or results in our free, online ebook) **and those on the peripheries of society** (19 hits or results in our free, online ebook).

1. By far the most common meaning is (alphabetically) battered women, economically poor, excluded, homeless, immigrants who do not have the proper papers, migrants, outsiders, people and situations in pain and suffering, physically challenged, single mothers, wounded.
2. The second meaning is the “nones,” those who have distanced themselves from the Catholic Church, those who have drifted away, those who have little faith, those who indifferent, those who have never really given thought to God.

3. The third meaning is those people who are separated from, or alienated from, the Catholic Church for a variety of reasons. American Catholic lay woman and campus minister Katie Diller describes them as "imperfect disciples:"

When I commented recently about calling "imperfect disciples" to service, I was thinking of young adults who, like St. Matthew the Tax Collector, may not be living according to Church teachings at the time of their invitation.

1. Young adults who may not attend Mass every Sunday.
2. Young adults may cohabitant with their significant other.
3. Young adults may support movements that the Catholic Church hierarchy is wary of (LGBTQ pride, etc.)

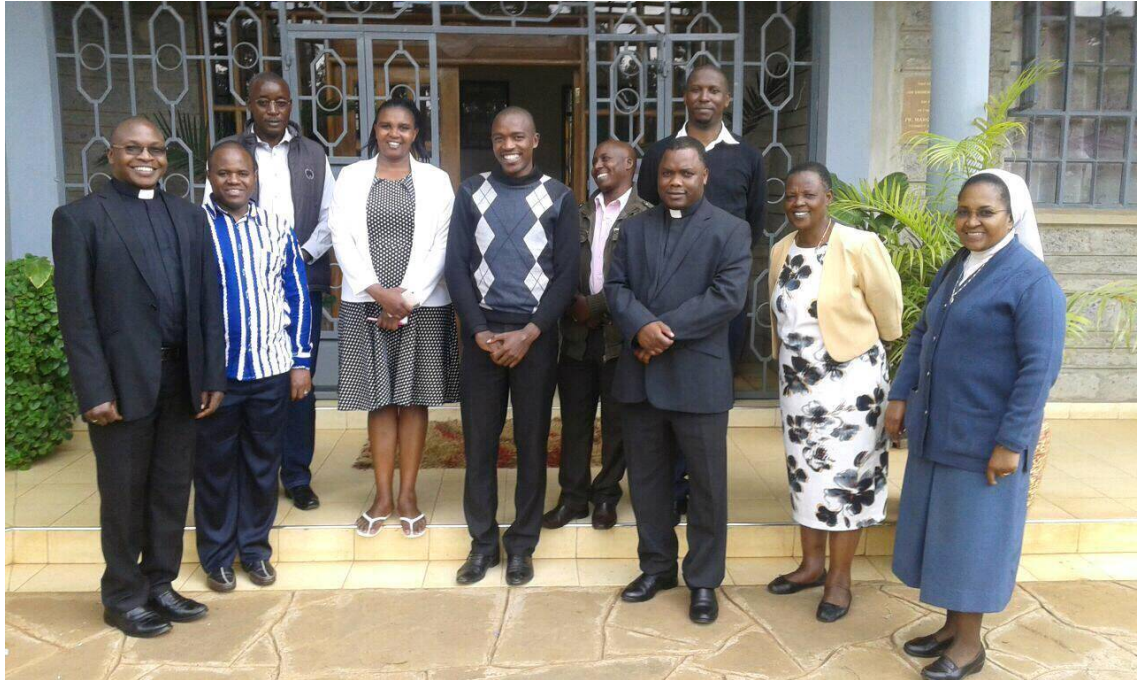
Often, young adults do not seek to hide this divergence from "orthodoxy." Older adults who are called to serve in lay leadership positions may be better at hiding their divergence from church teachings. This may be the use of birth control, lack of almsgiving or concern for the poor, waste or abuse of resources, unethical business practices, racial or sexual discrimination, pornography use (which amounts to support for human trafficking), etc. Hidden sins!

We are all "imperfect disciples," but young people often wear their sins on their sleeves, and therefore are excluded from lay leadership opportunities. I say call them to service anyway and when I say "CALL", I mean actively invite, not passively hope that someone stumbles in the door!⁹³⁸

This third meaning covers a whole variety of people who cannot receive the sacraments like people who have not had their marriage sacramentalized, divorced and remarried Catholics, people in same sex marriages, second wives in polygamous unions.

From Peter Mbichu: "St. Anne SCC in Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Buruburu 1 in Nairobi, Kenya had its weekly session in our house last evening. 11 of the 14 members belonging to this SCC attended. All women except me, no couples except my wife Mary and I. I decided to become a keen observer. Taking the shorter form of the Gospel of next week, *Matthew* 13:1-9 instead of *Matthew* 13:1-23, the members delved into the meaning and application of the parable of the sower. During the session, I fantasized how wonderful it will be when indeed SCCs in Africa are networked and can share faith experiences. SCCs are the "Church on the Move." I am reassured by what I witnessed yesterday: democratic, open, real life application of the Holy Scriptures to daily life. The Church in Africa is alive and well.

⁹³⁸ Katie Diller, "Catholic Standards for Excellence Forum – a Leadership Roundtable Initiative, retrieved on 12 July, 2017," http://catholicstandardsforum.org/forum/topics/imperfect-disciple?commentId=6426509%3AComment%3A23314&xg_source=msg_com_forum



The SCC Networking Team met at Donum Dei Conference Center, Karen, Nairobi to discuss on how we can link SCCs within Africa itself and to the outside continents.

The new book *Everyone Leads: How to Revitalize the Catholic Church* by Chris Lowney has an interesting section called “Hey, America, Let’s Catch up with Kenya.” It focuses on the Catholic Church’s new culture of leadership and describes Small Christian Communities (SCCs) or *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo za Kikristo* (JNNK) in Swahili in St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Nairobi, Kenya. The leadership ministry of the local lay leaders (men and women) such as Lucy Kungu, Peter Karanja and Samuel Waweru is highlighted. Co-responsibility in the church is exemplified in deeds, not just talked about in words. The section ends with: “Just as Africa conceived the *jumuiya* to build the church within its culture, we in USA too must find imaginative ways to unleash each Catholic’s gifts.”

From the “Small Groups Newsletter”:

<http://www.smallgroups.com>

This insightful book describes concretely the SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa and how SCCs are a pastoral structure that empowers lay people and unleashes African lay Catholics’ gifts.

Just this past week in one of my Facebook groups for small-group ministry point people, someone asked the question: Are you in a church of small groups, or a church with small groups? In 2001, *Building a Church of Small Groups* was released, and we learned the story of Willow Creek transitioning from a church with groups to a church of groups. In other words, they went from a church with many ministries—which included small groups—to a church centered on small groups as the way of doing life and ministry.

Over 10 years later, the terms have stuck, and countless churches have embarked on the journey of becoming a church of groups. Rather than offer a buffet of ministries for church members to choose from, these churches are clear upfront: small groups are the core of our ministry and the way we develop disciples. If your church is ready to transition to a more focused, holistic approach to small-group ministry, this week's featured Training Tool will serve as an excellent resource. For a free sample from this resource, read "Start Where You Are."

In Eastern Africa we could ask: Are we a church of small communities, or a church with small communities?

Some comments:

Ben Wanjala: "We are a church with small communities."

Haile Adalo: "Yes! We started a Christian life from personal life and Small Family Communities to Small Christian Communities, then to Christian Church Community building. Today we focus on Small Christian Community *Bible* sharing and prayer. This has really inspired us. The good news of our Ethiopian and Eritrean SCCs is the arrival of a chaplain from Ethiopian Capuchin Congregation to lead us in South Africa. 'Church' will grow by the SCC spiritual movement worldwide.

Rita Muthayi: "Yes, we are a church with Small Christian Communities in grassroots evangelisation."

"Emerging Models for Community Life and Leadership"
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More information such as dates, times, call-in information, and optional reading materials to be provided.

November 8, 2017

Fr. Robert D. Duch

"The Lobinger Model for Parish Leadership and Ministry"

NOTE: Background information on retired Bishop Fritz Lobinger of South Africa can be found in the free, online Ebook:

Joseph Healey, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*. The Online Digital Version, regularly revised and updated from the 2012 print version, is available as a free, online Ebook containing 1105 pages as of 22 June, 2019 on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at: https://smallchristiancommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Build_new.pdf

Responses:

Using the "Search" feature in this free, online Ebook the word "Lobinger" comes up 55 times, for example: "A key for Lobinger is that the ordination of [married] elders would work in vibrant, self-reliant Catholic communities in Africa such as the networks of parish-based SCCs. He admits that some priests view a new path to ordination without formal academic training or the celibacy requirement as a threat that could undermine the traditional priesthood. But Lobinger argues that traditionally trained priests would fit into the new system. "The new local leaders (Married Community Elders) [in the local communities] become a leadership team and the traditionally trained priests become formators."

As one challenging response to the "Eucharistic Famine" in Africa: "The Lobinger Model is an innovative model rooted in the particular needs and talents of local communities. It addresses the theological conundrum presented by the priest shortage by expanding the role of lay leaders and ordaining them into service. The Lobinger model was developed by Bishop Fritz Lobinger who, early on, was instrumental in developing the pastoral model of the Small Christian Communities -- including a particular model of Bible study with central roles for lay leadership in liturgical services, catechesis and the social gospel. He ministered in regions of South Africa where there were few priests. He recognized the enormous faith and talents of lay people in the communities under his care and sought to empower them to carry out the fullness of sacramental life in their local community. You can learn more about his model by reading his interview at: <http://www.uscatholic.org/ordainelders>"

Lobinger suggest a unique approach that is a somewhat reduced version of ordination: of the three *munera* (gifts or powers) conferred by the priesthood, it would be only the *munus santificandi*, the power to sanctify, not the powers to govern (*regendi*) or teach (*docendi*), that would be bestowed on these local elders by the bishop.

It is very important that we keep giving the Vatican direct feedback and comments. Here is what Mwanajumuiya Alloys Nyakindi wrote on the Vatican Facebook Page:

I am recommending that the Catholic Church help youth/young adults to establish Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs or *Jumuiya za Vijana*) that will enable the youth to meet weekly and share the gospel of the coming Sunday. Also through this, the church will be able to create an avenue for the youth to share their own experiences as youth because as I work to strengthen Youth Small Christian Communities (*Jumuiya ya Vijana*), I have realized that the youth do not want to attend the same Small Christian Communities with adults, more so their parents. The youth want their own Small Christian Communities (*Jumuiyas*).

We congratulate two members of our AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team-- Father Lawrence Murori and Mr. Alloys Nyakundi -- who are preparing to travel from Kenya to USA. They will be studying about SCCs at Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA. Hongera. Pongezi.

The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops have called upon Kenyans to pray for "Just, Fair, Peaceful and Credible Elections." Catholics in particular are urged to pray a Novena, that is nine days of prayer beginning Sunday, July 30, 2017 to Monday, August 7, 2017.

May our SCC members actively participate.

Yesterday I met Bishop Edgar Moreira da Cunha, SDV, the bishop of Fall River Catholic Diocese, Massachusetts, USA. He was born in Brazil where he grew up with the CEBs. In Fall River he plans to start the "Be My Witness" program presented by RENEW International. It invites all parishioners to become partners in the New Evangelization using parish-based small communities — a proven way to encounter Christ, reawaken faith and motivate missionary outreach. In the first phase during the first six months RENEW International will guide the parish leadership (staff, pastoral councils, and key leaders) through the transformation process with training and consultation. In the second phase in small community members will explore key insights from Pope Francis' "The Joy of the Gospel" and develop the attitudes and behaviors of missionary disciples. The 12-session book and DVD work together seamlessly to highlight the attitudes and behaviors of disciples. "In all its activities, the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers. It is a community of communities ... and a center of constant missionary outreach" (Pope Francis in "The Joy of the Gospel"). See "Be My Witness," a program of RENEW International. <https://bemywitness.org/en>

Notable Quote:

"I consider RENEW International's parish renewal process to be at the top of the list of the most valuable gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the Catholic Church over the past three decades. By stressing the centrality of small, Faith-sharing communities, RENEW goes to the heart of what the Church must be."

Father Allan Figueroa Deck, SJ

See RENEW International's Website: <https://bemywitness.org/en>



With the Religious Sisters of the Precious Blood who are more interested in Small Christian Communities. After mass in Machakos, Kenya we visited some of the

needy families and shared the joy of the Gospel with them. It is through Small Christian Communities that you are able to identify the needy cases in the Catholic Church and society at large. Jumuiya Oyee.

From Father Lawrence Otieno, MHM in Northwest Cameroon:

“I have been busy with heavy pastoral work in parish of 17 mission stations and two institutions (a health center and prison). It is a period of three months that I have been serving here alone because the parish priest is away for his holiday. I am doing my best to strengthen the faith of my parishioners according the call of the African Bishops through forming and strengthening Small Christian Communities in my parish. I do that by celebrating the Eucharist in SCCs, seminars and listening to stories of the members of these SCCs. I also minister the sacrament of Baptism and other sacraments in these SCCs. Involving the parishioners in the mission of Christ and of the Catholic Church are major objectives of our SCC apostolate. It is great to see many women, children and a small number of men (one or two men) turning up for the SCC weekly meetings. I am very happy for their response.”

From Alloys Nyakundi: “People have really felt the importance of SCCs because most of the activities are done at the SCCs level. I compare our SCC in Eastern Africa with the Kenyan Government where power has devolved to the counties. I see our *jumuiyas* serving as counties in the Catholic Church with big and great roles to perform.. *Jumuiya oyee.*”

From Donna Ciangio:

North American Forum for Small Christian Communities (NAFSCC) Website and Facebook Page (<http://www.nafsc.org>)

"Dioceses [in the USA] are not putting efforts into SCCs in general. They get a program like RENEW and then it fades. There is no vision for SCCs even though it is mentioned in many documents and as a way of catechesis and evangelization. There are many bishops who don't even like RCIA. Very frustrating. I am trying my best to keep up with all I have to do and keep NAFSCC going. We have a Facebook Page, but it is hard to keep up with, so I am thinking about hiring a college kid to post stuff for me. If you want to post stuff or a few words about what you are doing that would be great. Just send to me first."

The website of St. Mark's Catholic Church in Charlotte, North Carolina, USA has a website with a section: "Daily *Bible* Reading and Prayer:" "A spiritual reflection on the daily mass readings that help cultivate a pattern of daily prayer and a deepening relationship with God."

From Francis Njuguna after the heavy business of voting in the National Elections in Kenya: "I feel like doing an article based on the impact of prayers on the elections outcome. I visited some SCCs where both prayers and the civic education were quite high."

“Members of the SCCs Model of Church are always looking for creative solutions. Take a SCC of Married Couples with Little Children. Finding a baby sitter when the parents go to a SCC meeting is expensive and time consuming. Solution: bring all the little children to the meeting and have them play together in a separate room.”

The last verse of this Gospel (*Matthew* 18:20) -- “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” -- is the Scripture motto of this SCCs Facebook Page.

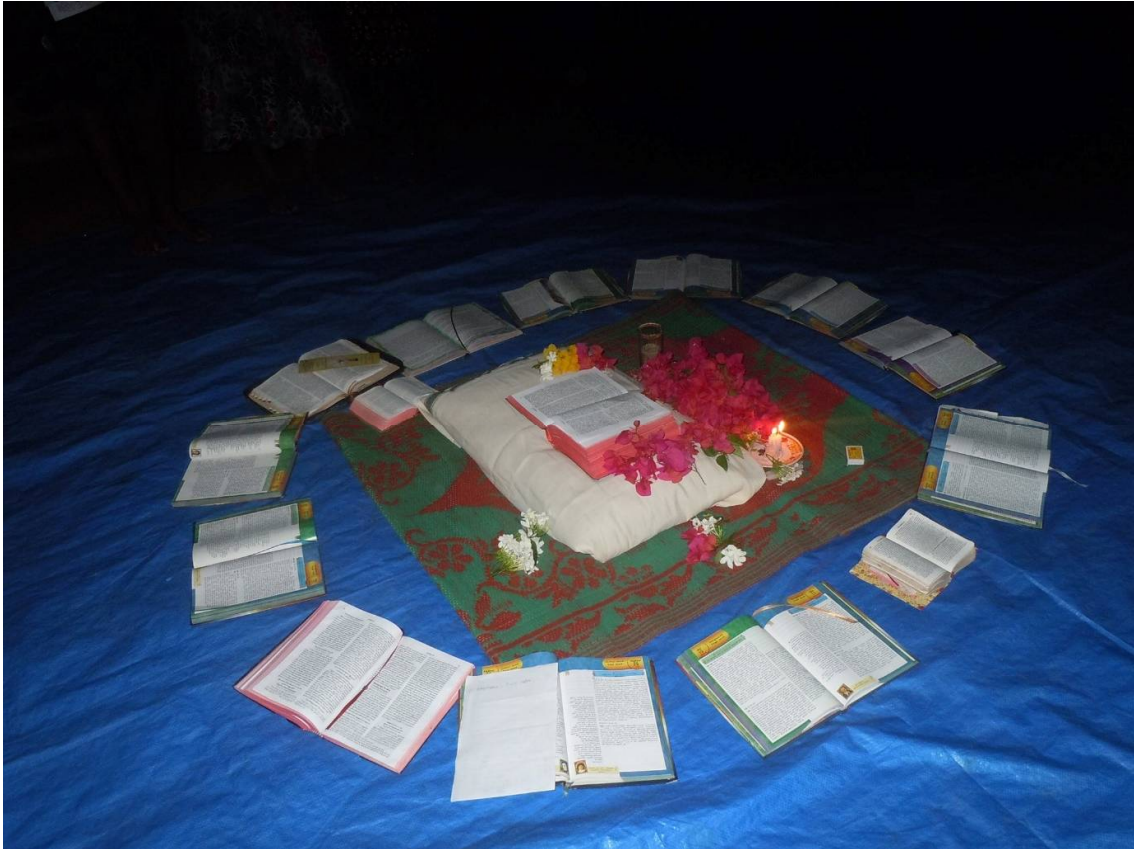
Online journals are a creative way of promoting the life and ministries of SCCs. *The Journal of Social Encounters* (JSE) is an interdisciplinary online journal with limited copies in print that publishes scholarly, peer-reviewed essays on peace, conflict, and social justice issues in any part of the world. In keeping with this aim the current online issue, is published by CSJE at CUEA in Nairobi, Kenya, in collaboration with the Department of Peace Studies at the College of St. Benedict/St. John's University (CSB/SJU) in Collegeville, Minnesota. While the JSE will publish essays by authors from any country in each issue, some essays by African authors always will be included in each issue so that African scholarship on peace, conflict and social justice will become better known.

Volume 1, Issue 1 (2017) includes "We Create the Path by Walking: The Involvement of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Peacebuilding in Eastern Africa" by Father Joseph Healey. Go to: http://digitalcommons.csbsju.edu/social_encounters/

From Father Moses Muttai: "Yesterday I had a very fruitful and interesting one day SCC seminar at Mary Immaculate Parish, Limbine, Meru Diocese. More than 500 people attended including men, woman and the youth. Hongera Padri Lawrence, the parish priest and Padri Mawira, the one in charge of *jumuyias* in the parish."

News From Sri Lanka:

- The year 2017 is dedicated to St. Joseph Vaz, the Apostle of Sri Lanka. He has been the pioneer of the Small Christian Communities in Sri Lanka. Following the footsteps of Saint Joseph Vaz, we have many awareness programs and pilgrims where Vaz has lived and served.
- 2017.07.10: the Second National Meeting was held in Mannar Diocese. It was an enlightening experience to the National Team. We have now started to raise understanding about Inter-religious Dialogue. The national meeting was totally dedicated to prompt it with a fruitful talk by Father Tamil Nesan in charge of Inter-religious Dialogue and Ecumenism. This was main focus of General Assembly 7th held in Bangkok in 2015. We Sri Lankans naturally live in harmony with the other faith people. Ours is a Buddhist country. But there are all four main religious people. Therefore, we need to create a better atmosphere for Christians.
- In Mannar Diocese since 1995 SCCs has grown and created a Small Christian Community culture among the people.



Our St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC is today, Tuesday, August 2017 at 9am in Texas; 10am in New Jersey; 4pm in Germany, 3pm in the UK, 2pm in Accra and 5pm in Kenya and Tanzania. We are reflecting on next Sunday, 27 August, 2017, the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year A. The Gospel reading is *Matthew 16:13-20*. I hope everyone has a chance to read this Gospel text ahead of time.

1. From Father Joe Healey: "My mantra is Jesus' question to the Apostles, "Who do you say that I am? This question is contextualized/inculturated to ask: "Who do you Africans say that I am?" "Who do you SCC members say that I am?"

2. From Father John Bosco Odongo: "WOW, I like this Gospel. My mantra is "who do you say that I am?" In this, I feel the call to a deep personal relationship with Jesus. An invitation for me to reflect on my personal journey and experience with Jesus. I can say he has been and he is still my protector, savior, healer, teacher, instructor, friend, brother, proto-ancestor. He is the cornerstone of my life. Without him, I am nothing. Jesus is my all in all."

3. From Mwanajumuiya Sister Rita Kokulamuka: "Who do people say that the son of man is?" (Mt 16-13). Jesus asked his disciples to let them speak and know that people had different views about him. They did not know who is Jesus. What about ourselves? Do we ask ourselves who Jesus means to us? Who is Jesus to me? My God? My Savior. My Father? My everything? Also let us use well the comments others make to speak about us. We can use them as the building block or like a ladder to climb to heaven."

From Mwanajumuiya Father Lawrence Murori: “Wonderful impression that I got yesterday from two of my classmates at Loyola University in New Orlenad, Lousiaa, USA: The two women were impressed by my sharing on SCCs in Kenya and they made a request that we can start one SCC with them in New Orleans, USA. They think that SCCs can be very helpful in the Catholic Church in USA since they will give Catholics them a chance to demonstrate the love of Christ and maturity in faith.”

Report of the 2016-2017 Campus Ministry Program at St. Paul Inside the Walls, Paterson Diocese, New Jersey, USA. Some highlights covering the college students of Fairleigh Dickinson and Drew Universities:

- Eric Munoz, our Campus Minister and/or Student Leaders facilitated 5 Small Christian Communities (SCCs), each meeting once or twice per week.
- Eric and a Student Leader facilitated a SCC specifically for athletes, which averaged weekly attendance of 15 students and two coaches, and resulted in attracting an unbaptized FDU football player to become fully initiated into the Catholic Church.
- Eric ran 5 retreats during the two semesters, each with their own theme and purpose.
- Eric ran 12 service projects during the two semesters including feeding the homeless on the streets of New York City and building houses with Habitat for Humanity.

From the English writer Margaret Hebblethwaite: “Being incapacitated in a wheelchair brought some unexpected blessings. Rather than an obsessive following of the news and searching for the slightest hope that England escape Brexit, she focused on a daily reading of the Gospels especially the Passion narratives and the Resurrection stories.”

“African Catholics are bringing new life and energy to the Catholic Church in USA. Kenyan Catholics in the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul have monthly masses in Swahili in St. Alphonsus Parish and have started six SCCs. This pattern is repeated in other cities in the USA: Boston, Massachusetts; Newark, New Jersey; Baltimore, Maryland, Houston, Texas. Africans immigrating to the USA want to live their community values (religious and social) from their African homelands.”

“Through the generosity of two Catholic Family Foundations in the USA, we can announce that the first phase of our SCCs Training Project in Eastern Africa has now been completed. After our first SCCs Workshop in Lusaka, Zambia from 2 to 5 December, 2013, we have now helped the ninth and last AMECEA country – Sudan -- to get SCCs Training by sponsoring two Sudanese Catholic laymen from El Obeid Diocese in the 2017 Lumko East Africa SCCs Workshop (Waumini Pastoral Program).”

“BREAKING NEWS: The supreme court in Kenya invalidates Uhuru election. My our SCCs in Kenya participate in free, fair and credible elections in a vibrant multi-party democracy.”

Yesterday, 1 September, 2017 we celebrated the brand new World Day of Prayer for Creation launched by Pope Francis in 2015 in the wake of his encyclical *Laudato Si'*. What are our SCCs doing to promote this now annual month of September as "Care for Creation Month" when we focus on ecology and the environment?

Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O'Connor, the Retired Archbishop of Westminster in London, England died on 1 September, 2017. May his soul rest in peace. May SCC members all over the world pray for Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor. In his brief introduction to the book

edited by Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton, "Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment," he called Small Christian Communities the heart of renewal in the Church today. Cardinal Murphy-O'Connor further referred to the SCCs as a "global moment" of renewal.

Congratulations to our YSCCs Team for preparing a presentation at this important Symposium 2017 in Nairobi, Kenya. Please encourage young people (youth and young adults) from parishes and universities in Kenya to participate in this important Symposium 2017 at Tangaza University College, Nairobi on Friday, 15 September and Saturday, 16 September, 2017. The "Final Report" will be a significant contribution of the Catholic Church in Kenya to the documentation of the World Synod of Bishops to take place in Rome in October, 2018.



Institute of Youth Studies



SYMPOSIUM 2017

Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment

VENUE Tangaza University College

DATE 15th & 16th September, 2017

15th September (From 2.00p.m.)

16th September (Full day, 9.00a.m- 4.00p.m)

Youth in Africa:
Emerging New Realities
- Rev. Prof. Sahaya G. Selvam

Youth in Small Christian Communities
- YSCC Group

A model for Youth Ministry:
A Case Study - Nairobi Archdiocesan Youth Office

Evangelisation through Education:
Fr. Peter Mutechura

Parish Youth in the Church - Sr. (Dr) Eleanor Gibson

Catholic Movements in East Africa - Rev. Dr. Joseph Caramazza




SYNOD OF BISHOPS
Young People, the Faith and Vocational Discernment

Registration: 15th September only: Ksh 100/-
16th September only: Ksh 200/-
Both days: Ksh 250/-

For more information: Tel: 0722-471474/ 0734-420935 || Email: iysmarketing@tangaza.org



At Tangaza University College Symposium 2017 Mwanajumuiya Alloys Nyakundi shares about SCCs with some African sisters.

On our SCCs Website we continue to document new examples of SCCs in the AMECEA Region. Under “South Sudan” under “Africa” see: "Small Christian Communities Changing Lives in South Sudan: Testimony from an African Missionary in St. Joseph’s Parish, Narus, Torit Diocese"
 By Emmanuel Obi, SPS
http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../pdf/scc_sudan.pdf

Note the reference to the SCCs Workshop in Torit Diocese organized by members of Solidarity for South Sudan in Torit Diocese. Thanks to the Catholic News Agency for Africa (CANAA) that originally published this article on 31 August, 2017. Please circulate this article to other people.

Pope Francis has issued a document that effectively returns to local bishops' conferences the leading role in liturgical translations. The move, which involved a modification of church law, reverses years of Vatican efforts to exert centralized control on the thorny issue of language in the liturgy. It is bound to set off a new round of criticism by conservative Catholics who fear that Francis is slowly undoing the legacy of his two predecessors. The pope's decision also underscored just how irrelevant the major Roman Curia departments have become under Pope Francis. In this case, the Congregation for Divine Worship (still headed by Cardinal Robert Sarah, one of the more conservative voices at the Vatican) was apparently sidelined. Instead, the pope appointed a commission to study the question and then issued his own document *Motu Proprio* ("on his own initiative"), a formula that the pope has used before to bypass internal Vatican resistance.

**APOSTOLIC LETTER (MOTU PROPRIO) OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF FRANCIS
 MAGNUM PRINCIPIUM**

BY WHICH CANON 838 OF THE CODE OF CANON LAW IS MODIFIED: Canon 838:

§1. The ordering and guidance of the sacred liturgy depends solely upon the authority of the Church, namely, that of the Apostolic See and, as provided by law, that of the diocesan bishop.

§2. It is for the Apostolic See to order the sacred liturgy of the universal church, publish liturgical books, recognise adaptations approved by the Episcopal Conference according to the norm of law, and exercise vigilance that liturgical regulations are observed faithfully everywhere.

§3. It pertains to the Episcopal Conferences to faithfully prepare versions of the liturgical books in vernacular languages, suitably accommodated within defined limits, and to approve and publish the liturgical books for the regions for which they are responsible after the confirmation of the Apostolic See.

Comments:

1. In the book *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III* under the section: “Continental, Regional and National Bishops’ Conferences:”

In *Evangelii Gaudium* which he calls a sort of blueprint for his pontificate, Pope Francis says clearly, "I am conscious of the need to promote a sound 'decentralization'." This means giving greater authority to our bishops’

conferences. A dramatic case in point is how the Vatican has usurped authority over liturgical matters such as the Mass and the translation of the Bible into local languages. While being respectful of the Vatican, the Gikuyu-speaking Catholic Bishops in Kenya found it absurd that their professional translation of the *Bible* into the Gikuyu language had to be approved by the Sacred Congregation of the Liturgy in Rome (whose officials do not know Gikuyu) even to the point of a Gikuyu-speaking Kenyan seminarian studying in Rome vetting the text on behalf of the congregation. From Joseph Healey, "Beyond Vatican II: Imagining the Catholic Church of Nairobi I," Nairobi, Kenya, Nairobi: Privately Printed, 2015. Chapter in Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator (ed.), *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2016 and Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2016. Selection of essays from three Theological Colloquia on Church, Religion and Society in Africa (TCCRSA) in Nairobi, Kenya in 2013-2015.

Available in different online versions:

1. Under the "African Continent" under "Africa" on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 6 June, 2015, <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../pdf/TCCRSA.pdf>.
2. Orbis Books Version on the [Academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu/.../Beyond_Vatican_II_Imagining...) Website, retrieved on 6 June 2015, https://www.academia.edu/.../Beyond_Vatican_II_Imagining...
3. Mikado Website, retrieved on 1 November, 2015, <http://www.mikado-ac.info/home-uk.html>
4. Kindle Library, retrieved 24 August, 2016, <https://read.amazon.com/?asin=B01J8VSMU6>
5. [Academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu/.../Beyond_Vatican_II_Imagining_the...) Website, retrieved on 27 August, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/.../Beyond_Vatican_II_Imagining_the...

2. This decision indirectly affects SCCs that use many local translations of the *Bible* and liturgical texts.

3. Thanks to our pope!

"The 10 September, 2017 issue of the *New York Times* describes a faith-filled Prayer Circle of mainly Evangelical Christians in Houston, Texas, USA who gathered together to join hands and hearts to pray and ask for God's help after the destructive force of Hurricane Harvey."

"Slowly the SCC Model of Church in Eastern Africa is being spread around the world. A telconference/podcast sponsored by FutureChurch in the USA on "a new and more specific exploration of lay ecclesial ministers to oversee non-sacramental aspects of parish life and administration" states: "Also on the call were other priests who have experience with Small Christian Communities led by lay leaders in Africa and Latin America. Those on the call learned in greater detail how those communities function and how they interact with priests."

"Question for discussion and feedback: It is estimated that there are 180,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa (the nine English-speaking countries of Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia). How many of these SCCs have a woman as its leader/chairperson/main animator? Please post your answers and comments on this SCCs Facebook Page."

Responses:

1. The reality is that in the Eastern Africa Countries the majority of SCCs are led by men. We have to change our attitude to promote genuine mothers because it is a time to cooperate with the Global Church. I would like to add some example from our South Africa Catholic Churches. The majority of parishes are led by mothers including sodalities and government departments. They are well trained to facilitate their teams in various diocesan areas and national offices. It is so important for our Small Christian Community women leaders to take up pastoral mission with their spiritual families in African countries as equal partners in everything. We as Christians can be led by women leaders because we have grown by their spiritual and social support. I wish a wonderful Heritage Day to all our beloved Christian families.

“To help our SCC Chairperson Martin Chebeti who was seriously injured in the August, 2017 Elections in Kenya while he was working as the Presiding Officer in the General Elections in West Pokot. He was ambushed and beaten severely by unknown people. We rushed him to Moi Referral Hospital and we thank God that now he is in stable condition. We are raising to clear the huge medical bill so that we bring him home. We miss him in our St. Martin SCC meetings and his good leadership.”

“Kindly receive our humble Christian greetings from St. Vincent Small Christian Community of St. Jude Catholic Church, Diocese of Arua, Uganda. We hope that all is well for you together with other servants of God at the Maryknoll Missionaries House, Nairobi. We are very sorry to inform you that currently we have received very many refugees from our neighboring country of South Sudan who seriously require some urgent assistance e.g., food, clothes, beddings, accommodation, medical care, etc as the refugee camps are full. Currently we have over 100 people (men, women and children) in our parish who need the support of the Catholic Church. We therefore need at least the sum of 10 million Uganda shillings to use as we continue to pray that the situation in their country improve.

So far we have managed to receive some assistance from our members as follows:

St . Vincent Small Christian Community ushs 1.5 million
 St . Jude Catholic Parish contribution ushs 1 million
 Other 8 SCCs contribution ushs 3.5 million
 Bishop Sabino Ocan Odoki contribution ushs 1.5 million
 Total amount collected in cash ushs 7 million
 Balance required ushs 3 million

We are therefore appealing to the AMECEASmall Christian Communities Training Team to help us financially to be able to rescue the precious lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ from Uganda. Any assistance extended to us will be very much highly appreciated. Thank you in advance. I will call to find out if you have received our letter of request.
 Yours truly in his service
 Geoffrey Olaro, Chairman -- St . Vincent Small Christian Community”

Response: “We will be able to make a small contribution from our *Mfuko wa Jumuiya*. In addition we are making plans to facilitate a Gulu Metropolitan SCCs Workshop to start new SCCs in the Refugee Settlements (new name for Camps) and encourage the existing SCCs in the settlements.”

“Kindly accept our humble Christian greetings from St. Francis Small Christian Community of St. John Catholic Parish, Arusha Archdiocese, Tanzania. However God’s servant as I had shared with you before you went for long holiday the health condition of one of our members due to breast cancer problem. Currently the situation is very bad and she requires to undergo an urgent medical operation in order to rescue her precious life. She is a widow having a family of six children to take care for. We need a total amount of Tshs 120,000/= . We are therefore appealing to the AMECEASmall Christian Communities Training Team to support us to raise the above mentioned amount required.

The following is our contribution:

St. Francis Small Christian community Tshs 25,000
 Other nine Small Christian Communities Ttshs 40,000
 St. John Catholic Parish contribution Tshs 15,000
 Total amount raised in cash Tshs 80,000
 Balance required to raise Tshs 40,000
 Therefore Fr. Joseph, any contribution given to as will be highly appreciated.
 Yours Sincerely in Christ
 Andrew Mbayiza - Chairman.”

“We express our greetings to you and entire Eastern African Small Christian Community Training Team. We have been much saddened at the loss of one of our church members and his wife. They died while coming back from Sese Island in Lake Victoria. The boat they were traveling in capsized on the way back home. They have left behind four orphans whom we are to care for. We as members of the St. Joseph Balikudembe Small Christian Community in St. Joseph Parish in the Diocese of Jinja have been able to raise Uganda shillings 120,000/=. Other Christian communities ush 110,000/= Jinja diocese ush 80,000/= Others ush 60,000/= TOTAL ush 370,000/=

We expect some ush 1,000,000/= could be enough to support the orphans in this time of need. We humbly pray for your support as we extend a hand of love to these people who lost their loved and sole bread winners.”

“The process for the beatification of the Servant of God Cardinal Maurice Otunga (from Kenya in East Africa) continues. The paper work and documentation are almost finished. What is URGENTLY needed is the proof of a miracle through the intercession of Cardinal Otunga. So we are asking all SCC members to pray for this miracle to take place. Please report any cure of a very sick person that take place in your SCC though the intercession of Cardinal Otunga. Thank you.

Responses:

1. Brother Reginald Crux, the Vice Postulator of the Beatification and Canonization Cause, writes:

“We are asking these SCCs to be attentive to the presence of anyone who is sick in their areas, particularly those suffering from an illness that is severe, and to pray as a community for the healing of this person through the intercession of the Servant of God Cardinal Maurice Otunga. The SCC members should then follow it up and report to our office if a healing takes place.” Contact information on

the office is as follows:

Sister Esther Ichugu
 Cardinal Otunga's Beatification Office
 P.O. Box 27043-00100
 GPO Nairobi, Kenya
 Tel: 254 020 4950000
 Direct Line: 254 020 20 495 0807
 Office Mobile: +254 706 127 147/771 836 557
 Personal: +254 726 442 806
 E mail: e.ichugu@archdioceseofnairobi.org
 cardinalotungabo@gmail.com
 Website: www.cardinalotunga.org

2."This request 'to pray as a community' is very important and can unleash the power of the Holy Spirit.

3."There are over 180,000 SCCs in the nine countries of Eastern Africa. What a powerhouse of prayer they could be in praying for the intercession of Servant of God Cardinal Maurice Otunga to heal sick members in our communities. Please report examples here on this SCCs Facebook Page."

4."I welcome this good move. It has come at the right time when the actual process on the life of Maurice Michael Cardinal Otunga for beatification purposes is on. Any contribution towards this direction is most welcome."

5."We invite SCC members to 'share' this post with your other Facebook Pages. Thank you."

6."Yes, let's pray for an extraordinary miracle to come up after seeking intercession of SOG Cardinal Otunga."

7. "This information is very central. We pray that the move will come to its fruition."

From Kerry Robinson in the USA: "Outward focus on mission strengthens parish unity. Consider those parishes that have organized to bring about more just conditions in their neighborhoods, or who have sponsored a refugee family, or who have formed Small Church Communities and opportunities for social outreach and action. In each example, this outward focus on others results in greater parish cohesiveness and engagement."

"We do send you our warm Christian greetings from St. John the Baptist Catholic Parish, Siginda Diocese in the Republic of Tanzania. We do hope this finds you well with your daily missionary activities. St. Maria Goretti SCC started a fundraiser to help five disabled brethren in our parish to acquire wheel chairs for them and we have so far managed to raise Tshs 1,350,000 and the balance remaining is Tshs 650,000 so that we can purchase the wheel chairs at once. The parish church and other SCCs did contribute. We therefore kindly do ask you for support towards our initiative of helping the disabled persons. Hoping for a positive response."

"Accept our Christian greetings from the Small Christian Community (SCC) of St. Polycarp in the parish of St. Joseph, Musoma Diocese, Tanzania. We have women who were

forcefully circumcised and have been suffering with continuous urine flow and no control at the ends of their digestive systems. By this they have their FISTURA OR THEIR PRIVATE PARTS DAMAGED. Also we have albino girls who have fled their homes for fear of being sacrificed and their body parts used for rituals. Life is sacred and a gift from God. We have to treat them and offer other humanly service but our budget is not enough. We expected to raise Tanzanian shillings 3,400,000/= but we managed only Tzsh 1,020,000/=. This came from: St. Polycarp SCC---Tsh70,000/=, Parish---Tzsh130,000/=, Other SCCs in the parish---Tsh450,000/=, Friends and well-wishers----Tsh280,000/=, Calvary Church----Tsh90,000/=.
TOTAL---Tzsh1,020,000/=.

We appeal to you and brothers and sister to come to our aid. Let's support these poor ladies recover from this situation by treating them. May God bless you.

JOHN MAFUMBO
CHAIRPERSON
ST. POLYCARP SCC”

“Holy Cross Cathedral Rumbek
Catholic Diocese of Rumbek
Rumbek, South Sudan
To the Small Christian Community Training Team.

As the chairperson of the Small Christian Community of St. Daniel Comboni in the parish of Holy Cross Cathedral Diocese of Rumbek in South Sudan I would love to thank you and your team for the great work you are doing to empower Small Christian communities in Eastern Africa. We are requesting you to support our Small Christian community purchase musical drums which are very essential during mass to the young audience.

We require a total of 1,800,000 South Sudanese pounds and we have managed to raise 1,000,000 South Sudanese pounds through our parish priest, members contribution and also the Comboni Missionaries Sisters.

We thank you for whatever donation you will offer.
Deng Moses”

“From the Catholic Diocese of Kibungo, Rwanda. Bishop Antonie Kabanda. Request to the Eastern Africa Training Team of Small Christian Communities.

Help for our member. In the 1994 Genocide this member’s two legs were cut off by a landmine. He finds problems to attend *Jumuiya* masses because of difficulties in movement. He needs a wheelchair to get around.

A wheelchair costs Rfr 2,000,000/ = Kshs 80,000/

Contributions -----Rfr 1,500,000/

Balance-----Rfr 500,000/

Chairlady

Grace Nyamukama

Joseph Serugendo

St. Kizito SCC”

St.Charles Lwanga Catholic Church

Catholic Diocese Of Kibungu, Burundi.”

“Small Christian Communities Training Team of Eastern Africa.
RE: REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE TO BUY MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS FOR ST.
VERONICA SCC.

Receive our humble Christian greetings from St. Peter's Cathedral of Butare in Rwanda. Hopefully you are fine back there in Nairobi together with the Maryknoll Society and also doing the missionary work through helping the SCCs in strengthening the church. However, we are kindly requesting for your assistance to help us St Veronica to buy musical instruments. The amount required is Rsh 2700000. So far we as St, Veronica have been able to raise Rsh 1500000 and the church plus other SCCs have been able to add us Rsh 600000. Balance remaining is Rsh 400000.

We are therefore appealing to you for a positive consideration towards this cause that we are trying to fulfill so that we can do God's work efficiently.

Yours in service
Watera Susan
C/P St. Veronica SCC
St. Peter's Cathedral
Catholic Church
Diocese of Butare, Rwanda.”

“Monday, 16 October, 2017 ends the First Round of the help to SCCs in East Africa through the ‘Mfuko wa Jumuiya.’ Tuesday, 17 October, 2017 we begin a SCCs Training Session.”

Interesting homily note on today's Gospel of *Matthew 22:1-14* from Father Lawrence Murori in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA: "When we joyfully respond to the gift of Small Christian Community, we participate in the wedding and make Small Christian Community our wedding garment. When we love the church and support our church as a gratuitous gift of God to us, we put on the church as our wedding garment. When we love our ministry and the services that we render, it becomes a response to that free invitation made to all peoples."

“Through the generosity of our SCCs friends in the USA, in September and October, 2017 we completed one round of our special AMECEA SCCs Training Team Fund ("Mfuko wa Jumuiya" in Swahili). We gave \$70, \$80 and \$100 donations to 77 specific SCCs in Catholic dioceses in Eastern Africa as follows: 26 SCCs in Kenya (covering 24 dioceses, one vicariate and one Military Ordinand); 27 SCCs in Tanzania (covering 27 dioceses); 16 SCCs in Uganda (covering 16 dioceses); 4 SCCs in Rwanda (covering 4 dioceses); and 1 SCC in South Sudan (covering 1 diocese). One SCC member commented using the Ugandan proverb *One hand washes the other*. We say that the two main pillars/priorities of SCCs in Eastern Africa are the weekly lectionary-based Faith-sharing and the practical action/outreach. The use of these donations clearly show the practical action/outreach priority -- helping the sick and the needy. Two concrete examples are providing wheel chairs for disabled SCC members and operations for SCC women members with breast cancer.”

“SCCs are mentioned often in an important new article on our SCCs Website: "We Create the Path by Walking: Evolving an African Narrative Theology" (http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../.../create_path.pdf).”

“During today's meeting of our St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC Mwanajumuiya Alphonse Omolo and I came up with this idea. To celebrate World Mission Sunday (22 October) we should invite one person who is not a Catholic to our SCC Meeting this week.”

Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa. **NOTE:** This is the SCCs Website Online Version of the Double Spearhead Nos. 199-200 (2012) Book *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of SCCs in Eastern Africa* published by AMECEA Gaba Publications -- CUEA Press in Eldoret, Kenya. This online version is updated as of 20 October, 2017. The complete book is found on the Ebooks page, The book is also available as Part 1 and Part 2 for those with poor internet connection or challenges in downloading the full version.

Go to: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/eb.../47-ebooks-.html>

To an article in *America* Media and Magazine on "Can the Catholic Church keep millennials from passing it by?" by Zac Davis we replied:

One solution is what the author Zac Davis refers to at the beginning: he belongs to "a Small Faith-sharing Community in my parish that sustains me." Weekly small lectionary-based Faith-sharing communities (in English, Spanish, etc.) and for different age groups (teenagers, college students, newly married couples, young couples with small children, etc.) can make a real difference in our lives especially if we connect the scriptures to our daily lives. For more information see the free online Ebook -- "Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa" http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../pdf/Build_new.pdf

“We hope that this SCCs Facebook Page can be a forum for conversation, discussion, exchange, sharing, important announcements, information, analysis, inspiring and challenging quotations, questions and answers and updates.

As an example, what are your views on the celebration of the sacrament of Baptism in a SCC? Concerning Godparents I feel everyone should have both a Godmother and a Godfather. I suggest choosing one relative from the mother's side of the family and one relative from the father's side of the family.

My ideas about godparenting have developed over the years. I personally think that both Godparents should be active Catholics (preferred to "practicing Catholics" that has a stereotype meaning) who support and encourage the two parents to raise the child. Even as the child grows up the godparents “accompany” (a key word being used more these days following the lead of Pope Francis) him or her in his or her lifetime faith journey.

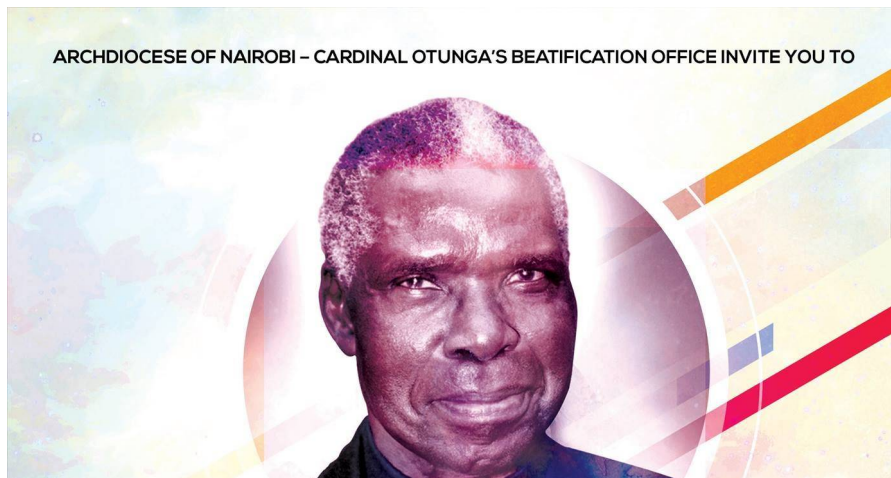
I realize the social side has taken over in some families, but I feel we should hold the line on the religious importance.”

“In a recent interview Bishop Erwin Kräutler, an Austrian-born missionary who headed the sprawling Diocese of Xingu in the Brazilian rain forest from 1981-2015 said finding ways to address the priest shortage would be one of the main topics of the special Synod gathering for the Pan-Amazon region to take place in October, 2019. He said criteria for admission to the priesthood must be modified to allow for

the ordination of married men. And he added that, since women now head many of the Small Catholic Communities, it's also urgent to ordain female deacons.

“Perhaps even Bishop Fritz Lobinger’s suggestion will be taken up,” he said. Lobinger, a missionary from Regensburg (Germany) who was Bishop of Aliwal (South Africa) from 1987-2004, is the author of *Like His Brothers and Sisters – Ordaining Community Leaders* (1998). The 88-year-old retired bishop has argued for an experimental project whereby parish communities would be led by “teams of elders” selected from among their number and based on the earliest days of Christianity. These elders would not be clerics, though they would be sacramentally ordained priests. A celibate priest-animator would oversee these various ministry teams.”

Fund raising concert, performed by St. Paul Chapel Choir and Nakestra Orchestra in honor of the Servant of God Maurice Michael Cardinal Otunga's Beatification and Canonization Process. May our SCC members promote this concert on Sunday, 19 November, 2017. COMMENT: The move to hold a musical concert in honor of our beloved Maurice Michael Cardinal Otunga is most welcome. It goes on well to further the cause, where prayers, among other commitments, are being called for.



NOV19

Interested

Fund raising concert for Cardinal Otunga Beatification Process

Sun 3 PM · St. Paul Catholic University Chapel, State House Road, Nairobi, Kenya

During this month of November may our SCC members pray for and with our deceased members, relatives and friends whom we call our "ancestors in Christ" and our "living dead."

From Bishop Martin Mtumbuka of Karonga, Malawi: "Greetings from Malawi. During our meeting of two weeks ago as priests in the Diocese of Karonga we decided to focus on promoting Small Christian Communities over the next 15 months as outlined in our Strategic Plan. One of the things we agreed to do is to ensure that everybody has some basic understanding of what a Small Christian Community is. To this effect we agreed to produce a brochure with the help of our Pastoral Commission. The attached draft brochure, which will

also be in local languages spoken in the diocese, is based almost entirely on the AMECEA "SCCs Training Handbook for Facilitators" on the same subject. As mentioned already, Father Joseph will lead this work, but my only work is to inform you of this so that you may vet the draft if it captures correctly the material in your Handbook and also grant us the required permission. I will be in Nairobi next week and Father Joseph has asked me to buy more copies of your Handbook."

Some comments:

1. From Emmanuel Chimombo: "Thanks very much for the good work being done in Karonga Diocese especially by embarking on the Promotion of Small Christian Communities which is a key AMECEA pastoral priority. After you sent the email, I quickly touched base with my colleagues like Father Joseph Healey, the Maryknoll priest who is a co-editor of the Handbook, and we have both admired your work. So the Team can proceed with the Brochures and the Translations of the same into the vernacular languages as per your proposal.

I quickly went through the attachment you sent for the proposed Brochure and noted that the Team that worked on it has done a wonderful job in summarising very well important points about Small Christian Communities.

We will organise the books -- copies of "Strengthening the Growth of Small Christian Communities in Africa -- A Training Handbook for Facilitators" -- for you as come next week. Take note that you will get a special discount if you purchase from 50 books above. Currently the price is still at \$2 each. The discounted price is \$1.50 each. You may wish to know that we have been receiving very pressing requests internationally to sell the handbook electronically. So we have partnered with the Paulines Publishers Africa and it is now available as an Ebook. We are also working with our ICT department to upload it on AMAZON and we are at an advanced stage to accomplish this. The price for the Ebook is \$1.40."

2. "A brochure for the basic knowledge of scc...I like this move."

3. "This is very positive and encouraging. The Holy Spirit is working in our Small Christian Communities ministry."

4. "That is so great."

5. "Dear Bishop Mtumbuka. You are an inspiration to all of us. May the other AMECEA Bishops follow your example."

6. This is wonderful news: "To ensure that everybody has some basic understanding of what a Small Christian Community is." This is very visionary to start from here. Lots of "hongera" to Bishop Mtumbuka for this valuable initiative. I see no problem in encouraging him to go ahead with the brochure. Maybe a simple mention of the origin of the content is enough.

In certain parishes the YSCCs produce and sell the parish leaflet of the Sunday Readings as a means of self-support. It is a good self-reliance plan (good fund-raising). For example, the youth in Dandora Parish, Nairobi, Kenya raise 500,000/= Kenyan Shillings (\$5,000) a year in selling the weekly mass leaflet. It is important that these parish leaflets

print the references to the Scripture readings of the following Sunday. This allows SCCs members and other serious Catholics to read and reflect on the Scripture readings in advance.

Some comments:

1. These church announcements forums -- bulletins, leaflets, newsletters -- should assist the congregation to be aware of the Sunday *Bible* readings in advance. This I take as a major challenge in our time.

2. Another way to get the Scripture readings of the following Sunday is to put "Sunday Mass Readings" and the date in Google Search.

3. The good news is that those of us in the smartphone world continue to benefit from the online services through various websites such as Catholic Online: www.catholic.org/bible

We try to post articles on SCCs from all over Africa. The latest is: "The Challenges of SCCs and Child Formation in Nigeria" by Raphael Okusaga. Go to: http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../challenges_niger...

Raphael Okusaga writes from Lagos, Nigeria: "At SCCs level, we infuse Child Protection into the Seven Step Gospel Method of Bible Sharing. The Gospel reading is connected with Jesus and children. The facilitator for the day enlightens the people on child abuses, the effects and the best way to protect them. It is based on "See," "Judge" and "Act" Method. We are developing training modules."

From the 18 November, 2018 issue of *Tablet*:

"A priest recently commented to me that what most affected how he preached on a Sunday was who he had visited through the week. Pastoral care does include patterns of regular visiting, the encounters around baptisms, weddings and funerals and so forth. But it is by no means confined to this and fundamentally needs to take seriously that clergy are not chaplains to a gathered community but priests for a parish." This relates to priests "smelling the sheep" and visiting parish-based SCCs on the ground.

Suggestion in our family/small community during the season of Advent that begins on Sunday, 3 December, 2017: "During the week when the whole family is present for dinner/supper, have someone read the Gospel of the next Sunday aloud so that when you go to Mass on Sunday you will have a deeper understanding of the Scriptures."

From Alloys Nyakundi: "Reaching youth over the world through Zoom. We should use technology to evangelize and spread the gospel to every corner." Having youth listening sessions with youth all over the world such as the students at Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana. Let us keep on empowering and encouraging the youth."

From Cal Desmond-Pearson: "I don't know how many folks on this Facebook Page are in the UK? However, even if you aren't it might inspire you to do something similar. Last year (inspired by Community Christmas) on Christmas Day I visited a couple of elderly people who I knew would be alone over the Christmas period. I took some cakes, soup, Christmas card etc. I've spent every Christmas alone (except one) since my parent's deaths in 2008 so I knew how bad it can be to be alone whilst most people are busy having festive fun.

Community Christmas believes that no elderly person in the UK should be alone on Christmas Day unless they want to be. Communities are encouraged to provide companionship to older people on Christmas Day by running a community Christmas Lunch event, joining up with others at a local pub or restaurant, popping round for tea and cake, perhaps organizing a film viewing or anything else that can be enjoyed by all those that take part. This should be a chance to meet up with old friends and make new friends creating bonds in the community that last well beyond the single day. We will provide support and guidance to those starting something new on Christmas Day, give a free listing to any events or activities wishing to maximize their reach into the community and guide older people, those who care about them, or those that want to help them, towards activities in their area.”

“Arts and Faith: Advent Faith-sharing 2017” is an adapted SCC Model being used during this month of December in parishes. Small communities of Catholics met weekly in their homes or at the parish center to read the Advent Sunday Scriptures, pray together and share faith. See www.ignatianspirituality.com – a service of Loyola Press, Chicago.

From Francis Njuguna: “In his 2017 *Pastoral Letter on the Nativity*, his Eminence John Cardinal Njue, Archbishop of Nairobi Archdiocese has highlighted the impact of the Small Christian Communities (SCCs). He says: ‘As Christians of the Archdiocese of Nairobi embracing many ethnic and political affiliations, we are in a unique position to help heal our nation, and forge ahead together to build a united, prosperous Kenya where the dignity of each person is respected. This we must do through our Small Christian Communities and apostolic groups, through our parishes and deaneries.’”

“The St. Charles Lwanga Swahili Community in St. Alphonsus Parish, Archdiocese of St Paul -- Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA meets monthly at the parish to pray the rosary and participate in Mass in Swahili. The community provides support for children’s education, baptisms, weddings and funerals. About 150 people come to the gatherings. St. Alphonsus has provided a home for Swahili-speaking Catholics to foster unity.”

“During our Sunday liturgies during this meaningful Christmas and New Year's season, St. Joseph is very important. In our SCCs let us remember the prayer of Little Brother Carlo Carretto (an Orbis Books author) to St. Joseph: ‘Teach us to be small and poor in our work and humble and hidden in life.’”⁹³⁹

“How are we SCC members celebrating today 1 January as the World Day of Peace on the theme of ‘Migrants and Refugees?’ It’s a clear teaching on immigration. Pope Francis calls for greater compassion and inclusion. He gives ‘four mileposts for action’ and provides easy buzz words to the world community: welcoming, protecting, promoting and integrating.”

⁹³⁹ This is part of a larger beautiful prayer calling on Mary and Joseph for help: “Just as you were beside Jesus, you are beside us to accompany us to eternal life, to teach us to be small and poor in our work, and humble and hidden in life, courageous in trial, faithful in prayer, ardent in love.”

“Stella Rampai wants to learn more about how to be a good leader of SCC.” Reply: “Please use the free, online resources on ‘leadership in SCCs’ in our free, online EBook. Go to: http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/.../Build_new.pdf.”

Please vote in the new Poll: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/>

The best part of my Small Christian Community is:

Multi-ethnic small community.
Home blessings.
Peer group small Faith-sharing community.
Basic means of evangelization.
Personal spiritual growth.”

We see our SCCs Facebook Page as evangelization and mission – both a “learning moment” and a “teaching moment.” We have a very active SCCs Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/www.smallchristiancommunities.org>). Every week we have many messages posted:

- At least two messages from the Moderator.
- Daily Lectionary-based Scripture readings from Mwanajumuiya Alloys Nyakundi, Mwanajumuiya Collins Ongoma and Mwanajumuiya Xanchez Brialawry.
- Comments.
- Other fresh messages.
- Some “Shares.”

plus many “Likes.” Messages from the SCC Facebook Page are then permanently saved in various sections of our free, online Ebook.

“We hope that this SCCs Facebook Page can be a forum for conversation, discussion, exchange and sharing, that is, we want and need your comments, posts, messages. Just clicking “Like” is really not enough.

During a discussion at Tangaza University College in Nairobi it was pointed out that our Eastern Africa name/term/expression -- “Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs)” – may be hard for folks in Europe and North American to understand. Also there was a debate on whether the term “small groups” is useful – it can refer to some many different kinds of gatherings. We brainstormed on these names/terms/expressions:

1. Small Bible Study Group for Young People.
2. Young People Peer Group Small Faith-sharing Community (one of the five choices in our online Poll for January--February, 2018 at: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>).
3. Bible Study Group for young adults in parishes.
4. Small Faith-sharing Community of Young People.

Please give your feedback/comments. Which name do you like? Is there a better name? Thanks.

The responses on Facebook were:

1. Collins Ongoma: I can go for option No. 4 -- Small Faith-sharing Community for Young People. It gives an elaboration of what the group entails.

2. Frans Wisjen: "Basic Human Communities for Young People." In the European (most secular) and Asian (most non-Christian, except Philippines) I would prefer "basic human communities" (used by some theologians in the FABC context).

3. From USA college campuses: When Christian students and Muslim students share together the name used is "Basic Human Communities for Young People" and "Small Human Communities for Young People." "Student Small Human Communities. "Student Basic Human Communities."

American lay theologian Kevin Ahern has this insight: "I am just finishing editing a book called *God's Quad: Small Faith Communities on Campus and Beyond* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018). One chapter is about the need for young people to be truly heard by their pastors and bishops. This not only enhances our understanding of their experiences of God, but also helps them to see their own dignity and membership in the church."

FutureChurch Teleconference on the theme "Pastoral Responses to the Worldwide Eucharistic Famine." Part of the "Emerging Models for Parish, Community Life and Leadership Teleconferences Series." Includes the importance of the Small Christian Communities Pastoral Model of Church.

8 p.m. USA Eastern Time on Wednesday, 21 March, 2018. 3 a.m. East Africa Time on Thursday, 22 March, 2018. To sign up/register free go to:

FutureChurch Website

<https://www.futurechurch.org/emerging-models-for-community-life-and-leadership-teleconferences-series>

"Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Workshop. Christ the King Major Seminary, Nyeri, Kenya. 22 - 25 February, 2018. There will be 307 seminarians in eight years of training. The Catholic Bishops in Kenya have recommended that all the major seminaries in Kenya have SCC workshops and courses. The retired Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana a'Nzeki of Nairobi Archdiocese said: 'Our seminarians in Kenya must have courses and workshops on SCCs during their seminary training. It is too late if we wait until after they are ordained.'"

"We are discovering that we need specific SCCs for each age group/half generation of young people. A new category is Young Professionals Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs). Claire Caralp, the president of the Coordination of Young Catholic Professionals in France and one of the three member delegation of French young people going to the pre-synod that will be held in Rome from 19-24 March, 2018 has this interesting observation: 'Falling between student ministry and family ministry, we young professionals are a generation that is often forgotten.'"

Comments:

1. "Pope Francis is aware that we are always forgotten and that's why 2018 is the year for young people. I hope things will change after the synod."

2. "It's true young professionals are forgotten. They actually have difficulty in identifying which group they fit in because they're neither students nor in marriage. YPSCCs suitably bridges the gap."

“A pleasant surprise is the visit of Ugandan layman Peter Mabiya to Nairobi, Kenya. He is a strong supporter of SCCs. Part of the year he teaches in Burundi where the *Communautés Ecclésiales de Base* (CEBs) are strong. Peter's brother in law has adapted our AMECEA SCCs Bookmark into French with the heading: *Pour célébrer les 180,000 Communautés Ecclésiales de Base en Afrique de l'Est*. Besides covering the AMECEA countries the booklet includes Burundi and Rwanda. This bookmark in French will be used especially in Ngozi Diocese, Burundi. The printing of the bookmark is being helped by a grant of \$100 from the *Mfuko wa Jumuiya*. A website is under construction.”

“Prayer Intention of Pope Francis for February, 2018:

Say “No” to Corruption

That those who have material, political or spiritual power may resist any lure of corruption. This is a clear message for our SCCs Members who have to be prophetic and work for justice, honesty and transparency in both the Christian Churches and in general society. The challenges in Kenya are huge where the expression mega-corruption has entered into our vocabulary.”

A Book Review of *The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III* by Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Sister Léo Lushombo in the March, 2018 issue of the important American theological journal *Theological Studies* has this very challenging statement:

If the model or paradigm of the future is that of Small Christian Communities, as the book argues, then there is a need for the SCCs to undertake consistent theological formation⁹⁴⁰ because the laity do not have opportunity to access theological formation in many African countries.

Some comments/responses in the “Forum” section of our SCCs Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/www.smallchristiancommunities.org>):

1. “Right now we have 98 students in our SCCs Class at Tangaza College in Nairobi, Kenya – all seminarians. In a recent SCCs Workshop at Christ the King Major Seminary in Nyeri, Kenya there were 307 participants -- all seminarians. Yet the laity are 99% of the members of SCCs in Africa. How are they going to receive theological formation?”
2. “That's food for thought because it poses a big challenge. For me lay leaders/animators/facilitator/coordinators can get the basic skills to empower them if the institutions (Hekima College, Tangaza College, CUEA and Daystar University all based in Nairobi) offer SCCs courses that specifically focus on how laymen and women can be part of evangelization. Can

⁹⁴⁰ American Maryknoll missionary priest and theologian Father John Sivalon, MM has this clarification and insight in an email to the author dated 19 December, 2018: “I react a little against the word formation. It sounds very much like a top down approach or an elitist kind of approach to theology. I think it better to use a word like accompaniment or something else that would put both academically trained theologians and the lay theologians living in SCCs on an equal footing. All of them listening to the voice of God in the world and struggling to understand that voice. I wouldn't think you would want to move this whole process into a classroom but rather do it right in the context of an SCC.”

there be classes meant especially for the lay people so they can share similar pastoral experiences? Can basic theological reflection skills be integrated into leadership training and youth studies? These courses can be attractive to laymen and laywomen. With support from dioceses or parishes, lay people can be able to access these courses just like the way we take our catechists for training.”

3. “Just as we have catechist training centers and programs, we need lay leadership training centers and programs that focus on the theology and practice of SCCs. We need simple, user friendly booklets in English, Swahili and other languages on the “content” of SCCs, for example, the theological foundation of SCCs.

4. This is a real challenge. We have in place the training of SCC lay leaders/animators/facilitators/coordinators in animation, facilitation and coordination skills including collaborative ministry. Now we have to focus more on the "content" side: Ongoing formation and training of all SCC members on the meaning and importance of SCC, theological formation and pastoral formation on the specific SCC Model of Church, *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection*, family catechesis, justice and peace issues, Jesus Christ’s methods of evangelizing and mission outreach.”

5. “This is a statement that must be echoed across the diverse sectors of our Catholic communities in order to build and grow evangelization in every heart of our people. However, until we consider building the capacity of the laity (the context upon which Small Christian Communities happens) as a matter of priority, the aspiration to motivate many more lay faithful to participate in the work of evangelization will remain an unachievable dream. As the main pilots of SCCs that we consider a valuable vehicle of parish and spiritual renewal, we must invest in building the capacity of the laity in order to equip them with skills and techniques so they can improve and expand the quality of the outcome of evangelization in an African context. This is a valuable conversation we must emphatically undertake because the future of our Church depends on it.”

6. “This is an excellent comment, but there is a disconnect here. When AMECEA talks about Capacity Building Workshops for laity, they usually mean training in skills in management, office procedures, financial planning, etc. This is important, but we need to emphasize "theological formation" of the laity (for example, how to do pastoral theological reflection, how to use the steps of the Pastoral Circle/Cycle/Spiral) if they are going to understand and carry out the Eastern African SCCs Model of Church in theory and practice.”

7. “Indeed! In the theological formation of the laity the content should consider the concrete spiritual and social conditions of the laity and must not be overcrowded with 'hard wired' theological perspectives out of reach for the ‘ordinary laity.’ The laity must be involved in designing such capacity building contents and processes. The time for this conversation is right now.”

8. “Yes, the African laity in SCCs on the ground/from below/from the grassroots should help design the specific content, not inherit a Western theological curriculum designed for seminarians.”

9. “A good example of the theological formation of lay people in Eastern Africa is the Prayer Intention of Pope Francis for March 2018: ‘Evangelization: Formation in Spiritual Discernment.’ That the Catholic Church may appreciate the urgency of formation in spiritual discernment, both on the personal and communitarian levels.

10. This is crucial to our SCCs being the pillar of the church that AMECEA emphasizes. This is why AMECEA came to form SCCs. We are much ahead today compared to Vatican I where lay people had no chance to do anything in the church. According to me, there should be the introduction of theological training for lay people for the betterment of our Catholic Church in Eastern Africa in the future.

11. What would a “Theology for the Laity” Course(s) in Africa look like from the perspective of the African SCCs Model of Church as the paradigm of the future. Three emphasizes:

1. Ecclesiology Especially from an African Perspective:

- a. Avery Dulles’ *Models of Church*.
- b. Vatican Two Communion Ecclesiology.
- c. First African Synod Family of God Ecclesiology.
- d. Father Robert Schreiter’s “local theologies constructed with the local community as theologian.”

2. African laity equipped with reflection tools to theologize on the SCCs Model of Church from the grassroots:

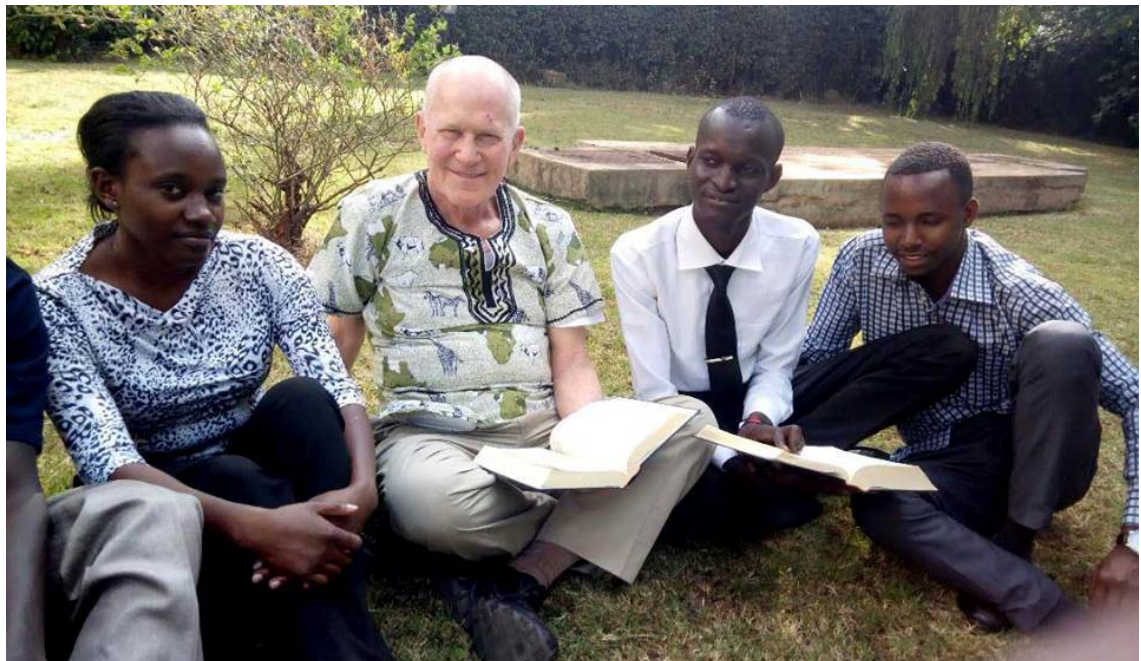
- a. Pastoral Theological Reflection Process.
- b. Pastoral Circle/Cycle/Spiral.
- c. “See,” “Judge” and “Act” Process.
- d. Basic theological reflection skills.
- e. Prayer Intention of Pope Francis for March 2018: “Evangelization: Formation in Spiritual Discernment.”

3. African SCCs theologizing:

- a. African SCCs Reading of the Bible.
- b. African SCCs reading “the signs of the times” and theologizing on them.
- c. St. John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation *The Church in Africa* under “Living (or Vital) Christian Communities”: “These small communities reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel.”
- d. Doing theology with African lay people on the ground.

First, how can our SCC members in Eastern Africa understand the meaning of formation in spiritual discernment, both on the personal and communitarian levels. Second, how can our SCC members concretely practice it. Perhaps one step is prayerful reflection and decision making in answering the weekly questions in the booklet of the 2018 Kenya Lenten Campaign on “Reconciliation.”

From Raphael Okusaga: “The Lagos, Nigeria Archdiocesan Workshop for all SCC/BCC leaders and facilitators took place on Saturday, 3 March, 2017. 60 parishes with over 500 participants were at the workshop. We discussed Child Protection/Human Trafficking and the roles of SCCs. We also discussed the legal implications of Human Trafficking. The participants agreed to stop all forms of child abuse and trafficking. All SCCs/BCCs will commence once in a month sharing on child abuses and protection.”



Discussing the importance of Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) and Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection with students from Kenyatta University on the lawn at the Maryknoll Society House, Nairobi, Kenya.

From Edward Stephen Moku: "Today, the Small Christian Community of St. Joseph the Worker from St. Joseph Catholic Worker Parish in Kangemi visited with our Fr. Richard Quinn Early Childhood Centre located in Kangemi and celebrated Mass. They also donated to us some food stuff and clothing for the children. We are very grateful to their generosity and love especially this Lenten season. God bless."

From Father John Muriungi Njiru: "This updates you on what the office of SCCs is doing in Meru Diocese, Kenya. I am the Chaplain who was appointed by the Bishop after Fr. Lawrence went for studies. My main pastoral work has been to visit different parishes in our diocese and the move is amazing. I go around with my Training Team that I have formed. I have visited over 15 parishes and a number of YCS movements and also catechists. The Enthronement of the Bible is seriously taking roots. May I now request your team, if available, to come and share something with our Meru Diocese SCCs leaders between 2 to 6 April, 2018."

The following Teleconference Presentation had an interesting section on "Evolving the Small Christian Community Model of Church in North America and Europe:"

21 March, 2018

8:00 p.m. ET

Fr. Joseph Healey, MM

"Pastoral Responses to the Worldwide Eucharistic Famine"

The full spoken text can be found on the:

FutureChurch Website:

<https://www.futurechurch.org/.../FutureChurch%20Teleconferenc...>

Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website:

<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/futurechurchtelcon.pdf>

Announcement:

LIM 809, "The Inner Life of Small Christian Communities"

Online Course, May 28-August 1, 2018, Scholarships Available

Loyola Institute for Ministry, Loyola University New Orleans, LA, USA

Description

This graduate-level, online course examines Small Christian Communities (SCCs) with a focus on their inner life. Rooted in the example set by the earliest Christians, inspired by the commitment to SCCs in East Africa, energized by Pope Francis, and informed by the best in international research, this course considers all that goes into the establishment and flourishing of SCCs so that they can have an impact on individuals, communities, parishes, the church, and the world. A course on the Public Life of SCCs will be offered May-July 2019.

Features: In taking this course, you will:

- Discover SCC's potential for transformation and inspiration
- Learn about SCCs worldwide, including in the Global South.
- Engage with classmates from around the world

- Recognize the appeal of this way of being Church to youth, young adults, and campus ministries
- Study the role of prayer and the Bible in SCCs
- Understand the practical theology that animates SCCs
- Examine leadership dynamics in SCCs
- Earn 3 graduate or CEU credits

About the Loyola Institute for Ministry:

The Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM) of Loyola University New Orleans, Louisiana, USA has been a leader in distance ministry education; its online programs serve students on six continents. Its master's degrees and certificates attend carefully to context and are Catholic, practical, transformative, and affordable. For more information, please see <http://gps.loyno.edu/lim>. Listen to LIM Director Tom Ryan's interview of Fr. Joe Healey, MM on SCCs. Fr. Healey is an author and leader in the promotion of SCCs and helped develop this course.

Small Christian Communities are not a movement within the Catholic Church but “the Church on the move.”

Scholarship Application

(The deadline to complete this Scholarship Application is April 13, 2018)

For more information, contact Alloys Nyakundi at amnyakun@my.loyno.edu

“Today we had our annual Jumuiya Mass (African Inculturated Small Christian Community Mass) at Hekima College (Riara Campus) in Nairobi. Wednesday of the Fifth Week of Lent. During the Shared Homily (Buzz Groups of two or three persons), it was pointed out that during a mass in the home or in the courtyard of the neighborhood, if the priest preaches in the normal way the lay people can sit back, not focus carefully on the readings and even switch off. But if they know they will share their reflections on the readings, the SCC members will be much more attentive to the scripture texts and their application to daily life.”

SCCs involvement in the outdoor Way of the Cross on Good Friday is one of the most creative examples of liturgical inculturation in Africa. Here are some examples in 2018:

1. Kisumu, Kenya: “We started at 7:30 a.m. in the morning with a short drama then walked across the entire parish praying for 14 sick people in 14 different homes in our SCCs in the four subparishes (the 14 Stations of the Cross). There were about 300 or more people during the walk.



2. Nairobi, Kenya: “I just finished my favorite apostolic activity (prayer service) of the year in Africa – our annual outdoor Way of the Cross on Good Friday in St. Austin Parish, Nairobi, Kenya. I left the Maryknoll Society House on foot at 7:50 a.m. and returned at 1:30 p.m., (a total of 5 hours and 40 minutes that would drive Americans who like 30 minutes masses crazy!). The service was coordinated by most of the 12 Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the parish. About 200 people participated.

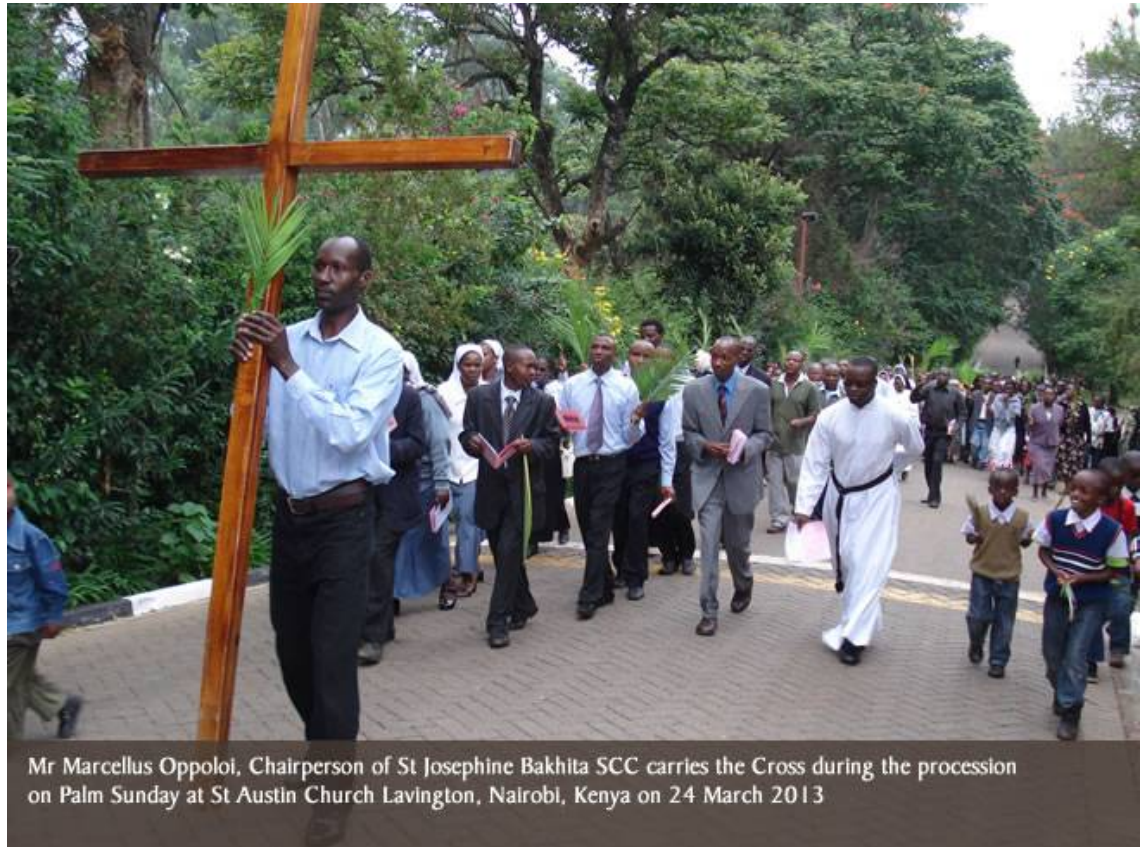
We members of St. Kizito SCC in Waruku, Nairobi Kenya started the 1st Station at the bridge at 8:30 a.m. We walked through the whole parish being joined by other Small Christian Communities such as St. Charles Lwanga, St. Bakhita, St. Petro Mwamba and St. John along the way.

Winding our way through the neighborhood, each station was animated by one SCC until we reached the parish church for the 15th Station (the Resurrection). Some priests and quite a few religious sisters joined us but the SCC lay leaders – men and women -- led almost everything. There was a rich combination of dramatization (acting out the individual stations), relevant scripture readings, reflections that connected Jesus’ Passion to our daily lives (like the crosses we carry – sickness, unemployment, even war and famine situations), songs and decades of the rosary. Yes, very long but very prayerful and very meaningful.”

For a video of our 2015 Stations of the Cross:

St Austin's Church Way of the Cross -- 2015 (By members of the Small Christian Communities)

Go to: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/videos/327-st-austins-church-way-of-the-cross-2015.html>



3.Nairobi Kenya: “We members of St. Kizito SCC in Waruku joined other parishioners at St. Austin's Catholic Church in Lavington to follow the main Way of the Cross lead by the Junior Youth after we have finished the Way of Cross of the *jumuiyas*.

St Austin's Church Way of the Cross -- 2015 (By the Junior Youth)

<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/videos/328-st-austins-church-way-of-the-cross-2015-by-the-junior-youth.html>



Small Christian Community of some choir members of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa. Before choosing and practicing the songs of the Sunday Mass we reflect on the Word of God (the Sunday readings) so God may help us to practice in our daily life. what we heard from the Holy Scripture.

An interesting exchange occurred on the theme “Devolution and SCCs in the Catholic Church.”

1. Victor Mutobera: “I followed closely the video of the Way of the Cross that was posted on the *Jumuiyia* Website. I witnessed how the Catholic Church is devolving her functions to a greater extent to lay people. During the 2018 Way of the Cross in St. Austin Parish, Lavington, Nairobi the priest gave the mandate to Christians who fully led the 14 Stations of Cross through the SCCs. He followed the lay people from behind like a good shepherd would do to his flock. Indeed, the SCC members led the sharing, reflections, songs and the rosary. It is now high time that the lay people are empowered to ensure full participation and commitment to the church. Some priests have overworked themselves. If they had devolved their pastoral functions, their life would not only be better and less stressful but also good for the faithful. Like Pope Francis, the priests and religious are meant to be with people, for people and alongside the people. Devolved leadership works very well, except when some pastoral roles are very specific. The church needs to involve more lay people in ensuring that they are part of the team and not just spectators.”

2. Small Christian Communities: "Devolved Leadership" is a good description of the SCCs Model of Church that begins from below, from the grassroots with lay people fully involved and in lay ministry leadership roles. It fits into Pope Francis' ideas on synodality and subsidiarity. To use one of the choices in the SCC Poll on our website: "Laity form the engine of SCCs" (<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>). It was the now retired Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana a’Nzeki of Nairobi Archdiocese who first said: “We are trying to awaken a new mentality rather than just setting up structures. When a parish is built on SCCs, there are no spectators. All are players.”

3. Joseph Healey: “This exchange of ideas on devolution and the emphasis on leadership on the local level has interesting historical connections. Many years ago the Tanzanian Government developed the *Ujamaa* (Swahili for "familyhood") Philosophy that emphasized 10 cell units (*nyumba kumi kumi* in Swahili) especially in rural areas. This led to planning together for common services like education (primary schools) and health services (local clinics and dispensaries). The local leaders took more ownership, decision-making and responsibility. The Catholic Church built on this idea in developing SCCs of originally five to 12 families living in the same neighborhood. This was the church from below and encouraged local leadership and lay ministries.

Recently the Kenyan Government has encouraged the *nyumba kumi kumi* idea for security reasons. Houses/families in the same neighborhood communicate, plan and act together. This parallels the SCCs structure and activities on the local level – the church in the neighborhood. More and more activities take place in the SCCs rather than at the parish center. Lay leaders are more active and responsible.”

4. Francis Njuguna: “Congrats Mwanajumuiya Victor Mutobera. This is what Mwanajumuiya Padri Joseph Healey has been teaching all along -- that the Catholic Church is no longer just the Clergy and the Religious, but the entire church community, lay people included. *Tunafundishana kijumuiya* (Swahili for “we teach each other in community). ”

5. Victor Mutobera: “I believe it is one way of keeping people committed to the Catholic faith.”

6. Michael Orondo: “Hongera Mwanajumuiya Victor. The church needs each one of us in order to grow well.”



Small Christian Communities are not a movement in the Catholic Church, but the "Church on the move." This photo was taken after the last lectures on Small Christian Communities at Tangaza University College. Asante sana Mwanajumuiya Joseph Healey and Mwanajumuiya Nicholas Obiero, both lecturers at Tangaza and Father Emmanuel Chimombo, AMECEA Pastoral Coordinator (on left). We are grateful that the summary and evaluation of our SCCs Course can be put in the context of SCCs being a key pastoral priority in Eastern Africa.



Many Faces, One Heart! At the end of our last class at Tangaza we sing "Bind Us Together, Lord" that worldwide is the unofficial theme song of SCCs.

“A recently completed 2018 Long Essay at Tangaza University College, Nairobi on ‘The Participation of the Lay Faithful in the Catholic Church: A Study on Rumuruti Consolata Parish of the Diocese of Nyahururu, Kenya’ states: ‘The daily reading and sharing of the Bible, and the reading of the following Sunday’s texts should also be done in the family so as to empower and improve active family participation in St. Lucia SCC’s sharing. I suggest opening a What App account so every day SCC members can read the Word of God on their smartphones. and create a Facebook Account to train members in how to use online SCCs resources.’”

“Parish reorganizations are underway in many parts of Europe. Bishop Stephan Ackermann of Trier Diocese, Germany states: “While the parish has been integral to Western Christian civilization, it’s also faced profound and rapid change. This has necessitated new models and stronger network systems. We simply cannot continue as in the past.” These new

models and stronger network systems include the "SCCs Model of Church" and "SCCs Networking."

Mariam Leidinger writes from Aachen, Germany:

"The question of how parishes should look like in the future or if the concept should be re-worked completely is a big topic in the pastoral of Germany at the moment. The diocese of Trier has started its own strategy and path which is inspired by the concept of Small Christian Communities, e.g. by exposure trips to the Pastoral Institute Bukal ng Tipan on the Philippines. They have been doing a huge research talking many people from all milieus. As a matter of fact, Michael Meyer is involved in this as a priest. However, we still do not know where the processes are going and what will fill the "void" the fusion of parishes is leaving, too. Especially for a lot of the older ones.

The hardest question is how to create familiarity, feeling at home, as the church develops within bigger pastoral regions, less church staff within an increasing individualistic and agnostic society. Two protestant theologians from Tübingen (Reinhold Boschki and Friedrich Schweitzer) have recently done a survey within 7,000 young people which shows that many of them would call themselves believers (41%) but not religious (only 22 %). Believing is something private for them. They are critical concerning the Institutional Church, but nevertheless see the churches as important players in society. In general, between more girls would call themselves religious than boys.

It is really a hard and painful discernment process for everybody in the local church in Germany that has "grown its own structure" over the last years... It is necessary to find a way to "keep what is good" and to let go what does not bear any fruits anymore.

"As part of our ongoing SCCs research, we are asking bishops (about priests in their dioceses) and superiors (about priests in their congregations/societies) two questions:

1. How many of your priests belong to a one specific SCC in the neighborhood?
2. How many of your priests during a SCC Mass/Jumuiya Mass in the home of a SCC member after the reading of the Gospel introduce a Shared Homily rather than preach in the traditional way (as in a church)."

Collins Ongoma's reflections on the Catholic Church on the Synod Facebook Page during the Pre-Synod Meeting on Young People, Faith and Vocational Discernment" in Rome in March, 2018: "We in Kenya hope that young people develop the culture of praying together because it helps them bond in a special way. I highly recommend that young people join Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) that are Small Faith-sharing Groups (<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>). Through such platforms they are able to have *Bible* Sharing that focuses on the coming Sunday's Gospel and relates it to their day to day activities. These small communities also create a conducive environment where they can share common topics that pose challenges to them and seek their fellow peer support. If young people are denied a chance to interact in the church, they will find pleasure elsewhere.

Sharing my personal experience since I joined a Youth Small Christian Community (YSCC) on the campus of Kenyatta University in Nairobi has made me feel at home away from home. Through the YSCCs college students have learned to be one another's keeper and also developed the spirit of self-denial in order to extend their hands to share the little they have with the needy in society. For example, during the just concluded 2018 Lenten period we agreed to have "phone fasting" in order to save some cash meant for internet bundles and calls. We used the money for gifts for a Children's Home that turned out to be very successful.⁹⁴¹

"'Go digital or die' is a popular universal saying. How is this influencing our SCCs ministry and evangelization?"

From Alice Alitsi: "We members of St. Kizito SCC in Waruku, Nairobi Kenya, on Sunday in our *Jumuiya* reflected on the Gospel of *John* 10:11-18. Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd" (Gospel of the 4th Sunday of Easter). Another member commented: "It is good to see how we SCC members read and reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday. Do we remember the reading when we walk into church?"

From Mwanajumuiya Grace Njau: "Report on the Pontifical Mission Society (PMC) Prayer Community in Amani Street Children Primary School in Riruta, Nairobi, Kenya. Every day the children read a Bible verse with their teacher Mary. Then every Wednesday they read the Gospel of the following Sunday (unless it is too long and complicated) followed by the PMC Rosary using the World Mission Rosary. The goal is to develop young PMC members who can join others in the parish on Sunday."

Photos of the newly established PMC Prayer Community in Amani School. The Class Three community was formed in January, 2018 with a few members and now they have grown to 17 pupils. The group meets every Wednesday before they begin classes with Teacher Mary.

We have a new bookmark called: "Celebrating Young People Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs) in Eastern Africa." Many thanks to Mwanajumuiya Alloys Nyakundi for his hard work and many revisions until we got it right. We are using the name "young people" to cover both "youth" and "young adults." The bookmark has a map of Eastern Africa, two photos of the Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs) at Kenyatta University in Nairobi, Kenya and links to the SCCs Website and Facebook Page. These free bookmarks will be available at our SCCs Workshops and Meetings in the USA starting on 23 May, 2018 and later at the AMECEA Office in Nairobi. Please spread the word.

Some comments on part of Heidi Schlumpf's article in *NCR* on the CCMA Convention. See the full article below:

NCRONLINE.ORG

"[Campus ministry group tries to balance different needs, agendas](#)"

<https://www.ncronline.org/.../campus-ministry-group-tries-bal...>

⁹⁴¹ Collins Ongoma, "KENYA: Young People Talk Together and Walk Together," *AMECEA Online News*, 13 April, 2018, AMECEA Website, retrieved 16 April, 2018, <http://amecea.blogspot.co.ke/2018/04/kenya-young-people-talk-together-and.html>

This article presents two models/approaches to Catholic campus ministry in the USA:

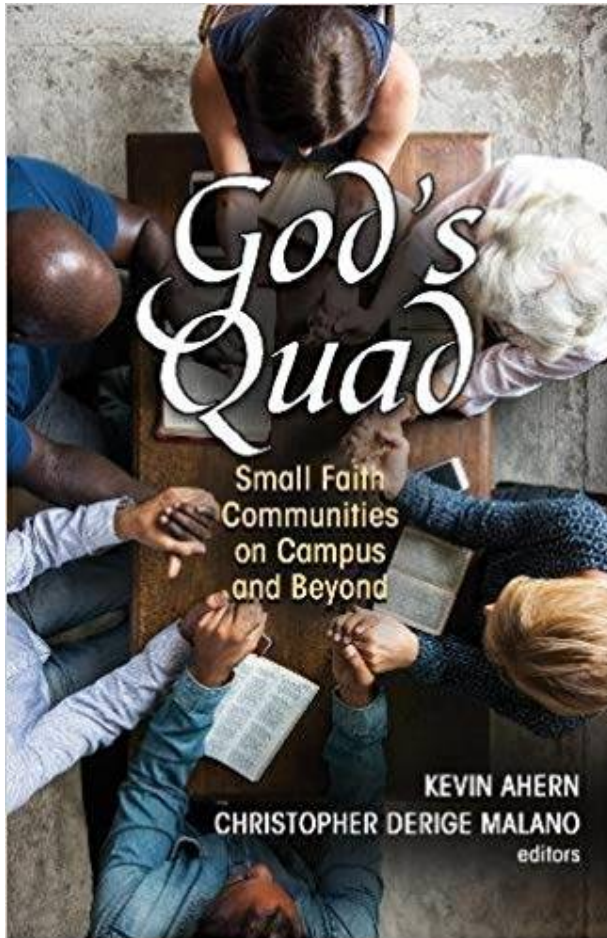
1. Evangelical Catholic/Evangelical Voice/Catholic Evangelization Model: More traditional Catholic starting with a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. More narrowly focused. Mission to serve Catholic students. Influence of Evangelical Protestants. Small groups are popular.
2. Accompaniment Model: Catholic identity in a pluralistic society. More broadly focused. Mission to serve all students. Service or justice work as an on-ramp to bring students into campus ministry.

It is interesting to reflect on these two models in light of the content of the chapters in our new book *God's Quad: Small Faith-sharing Communities on Campus and Beyond*.

Mwanajumuiya Sister Esther Walioba, MM, a Maryknoll Sister from Tanzania will participate in a Mission Sending Ceremony at Maryknoll, New York, USA today 17 June, 2018. She is going as a missionary to China (Hong Kong). Prayers please. Oyee!!!

“In his speech at the AMECEA Plenary Meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Archbishop Telesphore George Mpundu, Archbishop Emeritus of Lusaka, in Zambia, recalled the role of the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) that originated in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and then developed in the countries of AMECEA. Mpundu encouraged unity and solidarity among the bishops, urging them to strengthen their solidarity, collaboration and spirit of faith especially in pastoral renewal at national, regional and global levels.”

Alloys Nyakundi: “The best homilist in the world cannot in 10 or 15 minutes make compelling correlations between the good news and the experience of hundreds of individuals. But a small group of people can grapple with the Word together, help each other name the experience that is accosted by the Word, agree to concrete responses to the Word, and even at times agree to be accountable to the community for responsiveness to the Word. This is the reason as to why we need SCCs in our Catholic Church.”



God's Quad: Small Faith Communities on Campus and Beyond

Paperback – September 20, 2018

by [Kevin Ahern](#) (Editor), [Christopher Derige Malano](#) (Editor)

Kindle:

\$16.50

Paperback:

\$20.00

Contributors from five continents offer case studies of best practices and practical tools for creating and maintaining Christian communities for young adults, both within and beyond academic settings. Reports from groups in Africa, Europe, and India complement U.S. case studies including the Christian Life Community Program at Boston College, Catholic Relief Services Student Ambassador program, and Leadership Labs at the University of Hawai'i. With an extensive list of additional resources, including a Small Groups Field Guide from the Catholic Campus Ministry Association, *God's Quad* offers students, youth ministers, and campus organizers insights and inspiration in equal measure.

Catholic Women Preach Series:

<http://www.catholicwomenpreach.org/preaching/07292018>

Afou Chantal Bengaly, a married lay woman from Mali, preaches for the Seventeenth Sunday in Ordinary Time (29 July, 2018). Available as a Podcast and in Text. In the

Biography of the Preacher it mentions: “She contributed the chapter "From the Local to the Universal: Small Student Communities in Mali" to the forthcoming text *God's Quad: Small Faith Communities on Campus and Beyond* edited by Kevin Ahern and Christopher Derige Malano and published by Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY.”

Under “Calendar of Events” for September to November, 2018:

Four Book Events to launch Kevin Ahern and Christopher Derige Malano, (eds.), *God's Quad: Small Faith Communities on Campus and Beyond*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018. To be available on Amazon as an Ebook and paperback.

https://www.amazon.com/Gods-Quad-Communities-Campus-.../.../refvrsr_1_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1524187932&sr=1-2&keywords=God%E2%80%99s+Quad

Afternoon: Thursday, 27 September, 2018 at Hekima University College – Jesuit School of Theology, Nairobi, Kenya. NOTE: Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, *Religion and Faith in Africa: Confessions of an Animist*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018 will be launched at the same time.

5:30 – 7:30 p.m.: Thursday, 27 September, 2018 at America Media House, New York, New York, USA.

9 a.m. – 3 p.m.: Monday, 1 October, 2018 at the Jesuit Curia Hall, Rome, Italy.

Morning: Saturday, 3 November, 2018: Loyola Institute of Pastoral Ministry, Loyola University, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA.

The theme of the Book Events is: “Young Catholics and the Synod: Listening to Voices from Around the World.”

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[God's Quad: Small Faith Communities on Campus and Beyond](#)

Contributors from five continents offer case studies of best practices and practical tools for creating and maintaining Christian communities for young adults, both within and beyond academic settings. Reports from groups in East Africa, Europe, and India complement U.S. case studies.

From Mike St. Pierre: “I spent 12 days in Uganda with my daughter and a school group this past summer. I was blown away by the deep commitment to community there.⁹⁴² It made American ‘community’ feel quite different and I’m hoping to take what I learned from the Ugandans back home to the USA.”

From Kim Smolik: “I am thrilled to see all of the SCCs activity in my home archdiocese of Minneapolis/St. Paul. I was nurtured as a young person by some of the groups you mentioned. Intentional faith communities, or small groups, have been and continue to be

⁹⁴² Many visitors to Africa have commented on the deep African value of community. This highlights the African perspective on St Paul’s famous statement, “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it” (*I Corinthians* 12:26). Whether it is suffering or joy African SCC members, as one example, have empathy, compassion, love, union, solidarity with other people.

the center of my faith journey. In particular, Catholic Youth Camp, a summer camp that merged faith and fun and that had a lot of people who were part of NET Ministries working at it, helped me develop my own personal faith life from age 8-18. Then NET itself, and the small communities that grew out of it were central to my high school and college years. I wonder what it is about the culture in Minnesota that has made small Christian community life so strong?

I am writing not just to share my personal anecdote, but to share this list of resources (attached) I only just started to compile related to the engagement of youth and young adults. We need to stay on top of the research and dialogue in advance of the Summit on 1 February 2019, not to mention, it is one of my greatest interests. You will find articles that discuss 'creating community in new ways' and 'millennials seeking, creating alternative communities.'"

From Catholic Church Reform International (CCRI): "We believe the Catholic Church today and tomorrow is and will be small communities meeting in homes. The Spirit of Jesus Christ can once again survive in house churches. We can prove it at this moment by getting together with youngsters, neighbors, and strangers, finding each other in ecumenical house sessions where we listen to each other's attempts to live evangelical love in the disturbing world of today. What would be a universal purpose of all small communities: living according to Gospel values; living the commandment of love; Jesus' teaching of who is my neighbor; living the mission of Jesus to bring good news to the poor and to set captives free."

We just completed our "SCCs Training the Trainers Workshop For Those Serving in Refugees Ministry, Lodongo Spiritual Center, Arua Diocese, Uganda in August, 2018. We are 44 participants: 38 refugees living in four Refugee Settlements (Adjumani, Bidi Bidi and Palorinya in Arua Diocese and Palabek in Gulu Archdiocese) and six facilitators coordinated by the AMECEA Small Christian Communities Training Team.

See the article "UGANDA: South Sudanese Refugees in Northern Uganda Receive Full Training in Small Christian Communities" by Pamela Adinda. On the AMECEA Website via the AMECEA Online News at: <http://amecea.blogspot.com> Also reprinted on the Zenit Website at: <https://zenit.org>

Saturday, 1 September, 2018

"One-day Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Pastoral Solutions Workshop"

Immaculate Conception Parish, Mavurunza

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Facilitated by Sister Rita Ishengoma, STH and Father Joseph Healey, MM, members of the AMECEA Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Training Team.

Research question: Today almost all our SCCs have a saint's name-- a patron or patroness saint. But this was not true in the late 1960s and early 1970s when SCCs started in Eastern Africa. More commonly the SCC was known by its geographical location -- the name of part of a village in rural areas and the name of part of a housing project or estate in urban area. When did the shift to saints' names occur? Please comment.

From Alloys Nyakundi: "On Friday I was invited by St. Paul Parish young adults in San Antonio, Texas to talk about my ministry on Young People Small Christian Communities

in Eastern Africa. I was really encouraged with the way young adults in this parish are committed to learn and listen to one another. They promised to call me for a Young People Small Christian Communities Workshop because they felt it's the best route to follow.”

“Greetings Father Healey and the Eastern African Team of SCCs. I am submitting this request on the behalf of beloved our member Alex Katana who is a single parent, homeless and living under the painful conditions. Please I am posting this fundraising request to support building a shelter for Alex because he is aged and has no close relatives. Thank you and God bless.”

John W. Mugoya
St. Monica SCC

May all our SCCs pray for this intention in preparation for the "Synod on Young People" to take place in October, 2018:

Prayer intention of Pope Francis for September 2018:

Universal: "Young People in Africa"

That young people in Africa may have access to education and work in their own countries.

This prayer focuses on a key point: that the African young people's education and work opportunities take place in their own African countries.

American Maryknoll Missionary Priest Rev. George G. Cotter, M.M. passed away on 6 September, 2018, at Mission St. Teresa's, Maryknoll, New York, USA. Father Cotter was 88 years old and a Maryknoll priest for 58 years. Here is what we wrote in our book on SCCs in Eastern Africa:

In the mid-1960s American Maryknoll missionary Father George Cotter, MM was one of the first pioneers in Sukumaland (the Catholic dioceses in Tanzania where the Sukuma Ethnic Group live) to facilitate Small Reflection Groups of Sukuma people to use proverbs to get a deeper understanding of Scripture. A key is that these Small Reflection Groups started with life (Sukuma proverbs) and then went to the *Bible*. This experience helped the local Sukuma people appreciate more the wisdom of their Sukuma proverbs and the Bible. This can be called a “Sukuma Reading of the Bible.”

Report from China on the rapid growth of "Home Churches:" “As the Chinese Communist Party keeps tightening the screws on religious freedom by banning minors from entering places of worship, Catholics in central Henan Province are fighting back by reinventing their homes as temporary ‘churches’ for services that can include the whole family. Catholics parents have responded to state pressure by tightening their communal bonds and organizing gatherings at one another's houses so they can worship with the whole family including their children. Each family is continuing its faith activities at home and maintaining their strong bonds with God. Priests also attend these ‘house meetings’ to explain church teachings to younger family members and further strengthen their faith.”

“How many people know that in the Catholic Church Sunday, 21 October, 2018 is World Mission Sunday? All Catholics, all laypeople and all SCCs members have the missionary obligation to go out to proclaim the good news starting with our own local neighborhoods. The missionary, the evangelist uses all doors, all means, all avenues of spreading the Gospel. For example, today we reach people with the Good News of Salvation

using many means of communication: traditional means, mass media, internet, social media, etc. Pope Francis encourages us to be ‘bold and creative.’”

“Without taking anything away from the sacrament of Confirmation (ideally given as a Rite of Passage during the mid-teens), it is college or when, for whatever reason, a youth leaves home and starts her or his journey as an adult—that a young Catholic truly has to lay claim to her or his faith. Thus, the importance of Small Faith-sharing Communities during the college years.

NOTE: The transition from high school (when the student is probably living with his or her parents at home) to college (when if a boarding school is the first time that the student is on his or her own in a peer group setting) is huge. Here one’s faith and commitment are really tested.

“During our weekly (every Tuesday) meeting of our ST. ISIDORE OF SEVILLE INTERNATIONAL ONLINE SCC we reflected on how next Sunday we can focus on, and combine three important themes -- servant leadership, emerging paradigm of youth empowerment (a choice in our SCCs Poll this month) and mission. Our SCCs embrace servant leadership because of the mutuality among members where everyone's opinion counts in decision making. On the other hand, in some institutions the leaders feel threatened with servant leadership because they want to be seen as the bosses. How I wish that leaders would envision their mission and vision.”

From *America* Magazine:

“When asked what the church can do to reach out to young people, respondents told us that Faith-sharing groups and service opportunities should be priorities for the church. Marcus Mescher of Cincinnati, Ohio advocated for Faith-sharing groups. ‘Masses for young people divide the body of Christ. But Faith-sharing groups bring young people together to share their hopes and dreams, their questions and insights,’ wrote Mr. Mescher. ‘In Faith-sharing groups, young people can discover they are not alone in what they most deeply desire and find others to foster communities of agreement and accountability. They can be empowered to take responsibility for bringing others into the group and lead it forward in making connections with liturgy, service and other outreach efforts.’”

“Some respondents specified that they would like efforts directed at people in their 20s. ‘In my experience, if a parish has any sort of Faith-sharing or outreach that isn't geared toward people age 35 or older, it’s geared toward kids and teenagers,’ wrote Erik Raessler of Maybrook, N.Y. ‘There’s a gaping hole in the church where young adults should be. I’m 26, and there’s no one active in my parish near my age in either direction.’”

“Hannah Beeler of Eagle River, Wis., told *America* that her diocese’s Theology on Tap events had been a constructive space to build community. ‘I look forward to our Theology on Tap events every month. It is great to know there are others like me in the area who face similar challenges, and it’s nice to discuss the topics that we choose. I’ve met some wonderful people!’”

From Lawrence Murori: “I met a group of young people at Angela Merici parish in New Orleans aged between 16-25 years. They meet every Sunday afternoon for games and after games they share pizza together, pray and end back home. I played with them volleyball and they were very excited. They wanted me to join them again.”

From Clyde Christofferson on "The Wisdom of the Community":

How should we proceed with support for small communities – “wherever two or three are gathered ...”? Cultivation of the “collective wisdom” of the People of God is far more fundamental and important than distinctions (lay or cleric, free or slave, male or female). If those in a small group or “listening circle” listen so that their own contributions are informed by the lived experience of others, then a “collective wisdom” grounded in the Spirit can emerge. We need a strategy for a journey -- a virtual pilgrimage -- guided by this objective but whose concrete expression is open to the Spirit. The obvious starting point is "structured listening." That is what listening circles and other formats for prayerful small group discussion are about.

Mrs. Belza Ramos is an active member of our ST. ISIDORE OF SEVILLE INTERNATIONAL ONLINE SCC. She gives this "Touchdown" from the grassroots experience in San Antonio, Texas, USA: "This week I attended the Hispanic SCC meeting as well as the meeting after Mass on Sunday for reflection in Spanish on the Gospel. We are also doing a book study *The Catholic Warrior*. It does not have a study guide, so I created one and emphasized the importance on having the prayerful atmosphere with the Cross, a candle. This topic is on spiritual warfare, so we need to arm ourselves."

As our SCC members around the world meet in the middle of the week let us remember

Sunday, 28 October, 2018
Thirtieth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B
Gospel reading is Mark 10:46-52 (“Cure of the Blind Man”)

An interesting saying: "We pray out of lived experience and into lived experience." Our lived experience can be seen on two levels:

1. Local, grassroots context (on the ground context or the concrete, local situation).
2. World context (wider, broader global picture). For example, next Sunday, 28 October is the Closing Mass in Rome for the synod on “Young People.”

Sister Rita Ishengoma reports that SCCs will be involved in the 150 years Celebration of Evangelization to take place in Bagamoyo, Tanzania next weekend. It is big historical event in the country. The history started in Zanzibar in 1868. On 4 March, 1868 the French Holy Ghost Fathers (now called Spiritans) arrived in Bagamoyo.

On our SCCs Facebook page we posed these questions: In both of our SCCs Classes at Hekima and Tangaza in Nairobi, we are having a interesting and lively discussion/debate/dialog on how the homily should be given in a SCCs Mass in a private home: should it be a Shared Homily in the spirit and practice of the SCCs Model of Church? Or should the priest give the homily in the same way as he does in the physical church?

This week a student asked about how homilies were given in "masses" in the 1st Century AD. We know that St. Paul founded the first Small Christian Communities as House Churches that met in private homes. In these early years of Christianity, these small

communities were the basic units of Christianity -- before the beginnings of parish structures. See the many examples of House Churches in *Acts of the Apostles, Romans, I Corinthians, Colossians* and *Philippians*. *Acts of the Apostles 2:46* describes a twofold dynamic: First, the early Christians continued to pray in the synagogues in the Jewish tradition. "Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts." Second, the Eucharist was celebrated in private homes where the Christians gathered together in extended families. "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."

After the Jewish Scriptures (what we call the *Old Testament*) were read in these Eucharistic Celebrations in the private homes did someone preach? Or were these early Christians invited by the leader to "break open" the Word of God (share their reflections on the scripture texts)

Please give your comments and thoughts. Some comments/responses in the "Forum" section of our SCCs Facebook Page (<https://www.facebook.com/www.smallchristiancommunities.org>):

1. From Kenya: "A 'Critical Incident' was Catechist Samson's report on his visit to a friend in Thika Town in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya. He happened to participate in a Home Mass/House Mass of the Small Christian Community (SCC) of his friend. But this was not really a SCC Mass (Jumuiya Mass). The mass was exactly the same mass that the priest celebrates in the parish or outstation church. The priest preached and there was very little lay participation. In SCC classes, workshops, meetings and discussions this issue comes up again and again. There is a big difference between a SCC Mass (Jumuiya Mass) celebrated in a home or in the neighborhood and a regular mass celebrated in a home or in the neighborhood."

2. From Kenya: "My take, if it is a home Mass, a family has requested for a Mass in their home then the priest can preach. If it is a SCC Mass, celebrated for a SCC/s (the setting it is conducted is inconsequential), after the reading of the Scripture the members of the SCC/s are invited to share their thoughts on how the reading has inspired them and how they can relate it to their daily life."

3. From Kenya: "Home Masses are very popular in parts of Eastern Africa and have many meanings. Most often the host Catholics are celebrating a special family event -- wedding anniversary, birth of a child, graduation from the university, a sick person in the family, death of a relative or friend, anniversary of the death of a relative or friend, etc.

A Home Mass in the room of a sick family member who is lying in bed or sitting up has special rituals. This may be a Healing Mass. There may be a special blessing with everyone performing the laying on of hands. The Shared Homily fits the occasion so everyone can actively for and with the sick person.

At these Home Masses SCC members in the neighborhood may or may not be invited. All this affects how the mass is celebrated. When is the appropriate time for the "Guest of Honor" (for example, the university graduate) to speak -- at the beginning of mass, during the Shared Homily, at the end of mass?"

4. From Cameroon: "Wow this is great, I am following you directly in Cameroon. Pass my greetings to all who will be attending this open discussion."

5.From USA: Lawrence Murori, a diocesan priest from Meru Diocese, Kenya who is presently studying at Loyola University, New Orleans, USA says: "The word 'shared homily' is interesting in trying to know how SCC members understand it. Often basic catechesis has to be done. Personal experience has taught me that members keep quiet and only wait for the priest or a leader to do it. Perhaps a few SCCs might be advanced in sharing homilies during SCC mass because somebody might have taught them how to do it. I would hope that everyone in the SCC knows how to share the homily in the light of lived experience. So, I suggest the question: How can we stimulate the spirit of a shared homily in a SCC mass context?"

COMMENT: I agree catechesis is key. We call SCCs a “New Way of Being/Becoming Church” and a “New Pastoral Model of Church in Africa,” but priests, Sisters, Brothers, deacons, seminarians and especially lay people (99 % of the Catholic Church) have to be made aware of this new way of doing pastoral ministry. It is so, so hard for people to change their traditional way of doing things. That is why our training handbook is so important.

Chimombo, Emmanuel, Joseph G. Healey, Rita Ishengoma, Rose Musimba, Febian P. Mulenga and Alphonse C. L. Omolo, (eds.), *Strengthening the Growth of Small Christian Communities in Africa -- A Training Handbook for Facilitators*, Nairobi: AMECEA Pastoral Department and Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2017. Second Revised Edition, 2018. Paperback and Ebook available on Paulines Publications Africa. Ebook available through Paulines Publications Africa on Android Platforms only (smartphones, tablets, etc.) – not on Apple or Microsoft.

<http://e.paulinesafrica.org/index.php/book/bookDetails/1356>

Paperback (Print on Demand -- POD) and Ebook available on Amazon.

https://www.amazon.com/STRENGTHENING-GROWTH-CHRISTIAN-COMMUNITIES-AFRICA-ebook/dp/B07H2YRBTJ/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1536294296&sr=8-1&keywords=emmanuel+chimombo

I hope folks in the USA and Europe buy the Ebook version or the POD version.”

6.From Kenya: “It is more interesting when after the readings the priest sits down and gives members a chance to share on how the scriptures of the day have spoken to them as they point out what they learn from the scriptures of the day -- however not preaching, but pointing out their weaknesses and what Jesus is saying to them about their weaknesses. When members are honest in so doing, a new family of brothers and sisters in born.”

7.From Kenya: From Ephigenia Gachiri, Director of Lumko, Eastern Africa and based in Kenya: "The more lay people and priests the better who: Read the *Bible* personally every day. Spend time in prayer every day to know the Lord. Study other relevant issues in the Catholic Church.

Then they will be better equipped to share what the Lord means to them during homilies anywhere. IF not??? We shall just waste time sharing OUR OWN OPINIONS. The priest and the SCC members also listen to the Holy Spirit during each day to know what to do during homily time. No one can dictate for every occasion.”

8.From Kenya: “A homily should be informative, communicative, educative and transformative. I join Alphonse and Fr. Lawrence to say that our dear lay faithful at the SCC level have a lot to do. They need basic catechesis. Sometimes many of them do not even

know what the readings are. How do you expect them to shared that Word of God or give a reflection? Because even a priest needs not less than three days to prepare a good homily.

Besides, a homily is only given by ordained ministers. Otherwise it is a reflection or sermon. So let us look at that phrase "shared homily". However, our Christians need to keep abreast of the Word of God. I was in Fr. Healey's class in Tangaza two years ago. It was so enriching especially when I went for practicals."

COMMENT: "Thank you for these insights. I know some lay SCC members who read the Gospel of the following Sunday before they go to the weekly gathering (*Bible Service*) of the SCC. This is the ideal."

9.From Kenya: One of the students at Hekima University College said this about the Shared Homily in our African Inculturated Small Christian Community (SCCs) Mass -- Jumuiya Mass: "I was in a small sharing group of three seminarians and was enriched by the insights of the other two people."

10.From USA: Belza Ramos in Texas states: "From scripture we see that the Apostles after Jesus gave them the Holy Spirit had interactive homilies, as people listened, believed, were called to action, asked what to do and responded. As many of them were Jews they knew they were called to change some beliefs and practices and were "dedicated to the Apostles' teachings. As they went "to all the nations" they met in homes (after preaching in the existing synagogues) and broke bread. It is not explicitly termed as a homily but we see that there are questions, confessions, desires to change voiced after the teachings of the apostles sunk in. We see that concerns were raised , for example of the "Hellenist community of orphans and widows not being taken care of in the allocations of community assets and sustenance" and solutions were decided in a group setting.

I believe that most SCCs and their members may not interpret the model of sharing in the SCC setting as involving "homily" when a priest is not present, and we need to do some more teaching on that. I would think that when a priest is invited to celebrate mass for an SCC in a home, he would see it as an opportunity to have an interactive homily as listening to the needs of his flock, and the members see it as an opportunity for expert spiritual guidance if they resist anything in the scripture, are not clear in what their take-away should be or resist the call they receive through the scripture.

It is a "teachable moment" and a "learning moment" or as the African saying goes not an and/or but an and/also opportunity."

COMMENT: Thanks for introducing the expression "interactive homily."

11.From Kenya: Indian Scripture scholar Father Johny Thachuparamban, who teaches at Hekima and Tangaza Colleges in Nairobi, comments on one verse in the "Acts of the Apostles: Chapter 2:42: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer." He explains that these four aspects of the life and worship of the House Churches in the 1st century (what we now call SCCs Masses in the homes) reveal a deep spirit of sharing: Just as the first Christians shared fellowship (sisterhood and brotherhood), the Eucharist and joint prayers, we can assume they shared in the Apostles teaching and preaching, that is, if St. Paul comments on the Jewish scriptures during a religious service in the home, the other Christians also participate in this Shared Teaching/Shared Preaching, or to make a big jump, in the Shared Homily.

12.From Kenya: Sister Mary Nzilani states: "I tend to believe as per church documents that, the homily is given in the course of the celebration of Holy Mass and is a part of the liturgy itself. It should generally be given by the priest celebrant himself. He may entrust it to a concelebrating priest or occasionally, according to circumstances, to a deacon, but never to a layperson. At the same time prohibition of the admission of laypersons to preach within the mass applies also to seminarians, students of theological disciplines, and those who have assumed the function of those known as pastoral assistants; nor is there to be any exception for any other kind of layperson, or group, or community, or association. But in case a need arises for the gathered faithful to be given instruction or testimony by a layperson in a church concerning the Christian life, it is altogether preferable that this be done outside mass. For serious reasons, it is permissible that this type of instruction or testimony be given after the priest has proclaimed the Prayer after Communion. Therefore, my thinking is that, the priest should give the homily in the same way in a Home Mass (SCCs Mass) as he does in the physical church. This is because a mass in the SCCs remains the same as a mass in the physical church. At the same time, the faithful in the SCCs meets a priest in the SCCs one per month or even once a year during their feast days as majority say in our sharing. Thus, in such a case, they need to listen to their shepherd for spiritual nourishment. For their engagement, it should be done after mass. Therefore the priest should prepare to be with them and listen to them. More so, not all know how to share and so, it may be a kind of a destruction during mass for if some are not effective, others may take it as a laughing matter. A good example is our mass in Hekima last two weeks. I sat with a lady who just listened to me. When I gave her a chance to speak, she told me what I have said is enough. No word came from her mouth as an input. In case this is demanded on the higher side, then good preparation is needed on the side of the SCC members so as to be aware of what to do."

13.From Tanzania: A Maryknoll missionary priest in Musoma, Tanzania had doubts about the SCCs Model of Church. He felt that lay people in their weekly SCCs gatherings were not capable by themselves of reflecting on the *Bible*. They needed help from the outside.

These entries on our SCCs Facebook Page⁹⁴³ show that it is much more than just casual and superficial social networking. We hope that this SCCs Facebook Page can be a forum for conversation, discussion, exchange, important announcements, information, analysis, inspiring and challenging quotations, questions and answers and updates including:

- Brainstorming on spiritual, pastoral and missionary issues.
- Concrete, practical experiences, stories and case studies of grassroots SCCs.
- Daily and Sundays Lectionary Readings/Commentary/Faith-sharing including Homilies and Sermons.
- Important "space" ("place") for spiritual, pastoral and theological conversation, questions, discussion and sharing.
 - Faith-sharing.

⁹⁴³ The same applies to What'sApp Groups and other social media.

- Discussion on the content (themes and topics) of articles, theses, booklets and books on SCCs.
- African Christian Palaver Theology or African Christian Conversation Theology.
- Discussion on the process or methodology of theology.
- Meaningful “Prayer Corner.”
- Photographs and Video Clips.
- Providing new SCCs resources, tools and links.
- Requests for financial help from our *Mfuko wa Jumuiya*.
- Spiritual and Pastoral Reading.

This SCCs Facebook Page is pastoral ministry. It is evangelization. It provides important research, formation (spiritual), training, learning and teaching resources, tools and references.

A concrete example is that several members (fans) weekly post their reflections on the Scripture Readings of the following Sunday on this SCCs Facebook Page. These reflections can be very helpful for personal prayer, SCC reflections and to aid preachers and teachers in preparing their homilies, sermons and other teachings for the following Sunday in the Catholic Church’s Liturgical Cycle.

The SCCs team started four Online (or Virtual) SCCs as Facebook Groups on our website.⁹⁴⁴ These online SCCs are text-based where members post reflections on the *Bible* and related comments. Just as SCCs are a new way of being church, Online SCCs are a new way of being SCCs. Each Online SCC chooses its Patron/Patroness saint such as: St. Josephine Bakhita, St. Martin de Porres, St. Michael the Archangel and St. Monica. This is a special way of encouraging especially young people to be involved in SCCs.

Online SCC members share their reflections on the Gospel of the following Sunday and connect and apply the *Bible* to our daily lives and experiences here and now. This is an experience of Faith-sharing. Members can share new insights and ideas after participating in the Sunday Eucharist and at other times during the following week. Thus, the online reflections and sharing are on-going. Online SCC members help each other to grow in faith and explore the implications of the SCCs Model of Church. Each of these online or virtual SCCs states:

This virtual SCC's intention is: to foster personal relationships, family bonds, solidarity, and Christian belonging --sharing together, working together, and celebrating together. The purpose is to provide an avenue for the expression of our Christian faith.

The language of the internet is expanding. So we have such expressions as “the internet as a new way of being church,” Facebook SCC, Internet Small Christian Communities (ISCC), Social Media Small Christian Communities (SMSCC), Twitter SCC and WhatsApp SCC.

⁹⁴⁴ See Barb Frazee, “Virtually There: Small Christian Communities Online in Africa.” *Catholic News Service*, 22 February 2011, retrieved on the Catholic News Service Website at <http://cnsblog.wordpress.com/2011/02/22/virtually-there-small-christian-communities-online-in-africa> on 3 March, 2013.

Skype⁹⁴⁵ is used for an audio or video meeting of an Online SCC. Up to 10 SCC members (future technology will provide even a greater number of members and more flexibility) can meet online in real time. An example is the Our Lady of the Round Table, a worldwide Marianist Cyber Community⁹⁴⁶ that has African members. They meet daily online for Faith-sharing and *Bible* reflection. Another example is the Emmanuel Community that holds weekly “household” meetings on Skype where community members, including priests, pray together and share their lives.

Here is the original message sent as an email message and posted on our SCCs Facebook Page to start the first Skype Online SCC that was directly set up through our SCCs Website:

We are starting a new Online SCC that uses Group Video Calling through Skype. It is free. Members need to agree on a specific day and time each week to do joint *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection on the Gospel of the following Sunday. If you are interested please contact Alphonse Omolo at: alphonceomolo@gmail.com. Please spread this message to others.

We chose St. Isidore of Seville as the Patron Saint of our St. Isidore of Seville International Online SCC. St. Isidore of Seville was born in 560 in Cartagena, Spain and died on 4 April 636 in Seville, Spain. He is the Patron Saint of the Internet and Technology.⁹⁴⁷ especially because he wrote the first encyclopedia – a 20-book opus called *Etymologia* after the subject title of one of the books. He was a scholar and is widely regarded as the last of the Fathers of the Church. For over three decades he was the Archbishop of Seville. His Feast Day is on 4 April.

⁹⁴⁵ “The Strong Challenge -- Faith-sharing via SKYPE” by Donna Curtiss, Las Cruces, New Mexico describes a unique family-based *Bible* study, Faith-sharing and spirituality program in small groups via the internet. North American Forum for Small Christian Communities Website, retrieved on 27 August, 2012, <http://storage.cloversites.com/nafscs/documents/The%20Strong%20Challenge.pdf>

⁹⁴⁶ Information provided by Kenyan laywoman Lorna Mueni Kilonzo.

⁹⁴⁷ When we get discouraged or disappointed in the technical problems in our weekly meeting on Skype we remember the challenges that St. Isidore faced and overcame: “As a boy he despaired at his ill success in study, and ran away from school. Resting in his flight at a roadside spring, he observed a stone, which was hollowed out by the dripping water. This decided him to return, and by hard application he succeeded where he had failed. He went back to his master, and with the help of God became, even as a youth, one of the most learned men of the time.” To summarize: Initially a poor student, he gave the problem over to God and become of the most learned men of his time. Daily Gospel Email and Website, retrieved on 4 April, 2013, <http://dailygospel.org/M/AM/>

It is suggested that we pray to St. Isidore before logging onto the internet. One prayer includes the line: "We beseech you that, through the intercession of Saint Isidore, bishop and doctor, during our journeys through the internet we will direct our hands and eyes only to that which is pleasing to you and treat with charity and patience all those souls whom we encounter."

Using Skype Video Conferencing we started on Wednesday, 17 October, 2012 with one person from Kenya, one person from Germany and 13 people from the Maryknoll Lay Missioners Orientation Program at Bethany, New York, USA and four others.

From the very beginning we have had 39 people involved and interested in some way. Our permanent group using Skype has up to ten members from the following countries: England, Germany, Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania and USA. Other countries that have been represented are Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Swaziland. We met every Tuesday⁹⁴⁸ following this timetable: 9 a.m. in Texas, USA; 10 a.m. in New Jersey, USA; 3 p.m. in England; 4 p.m. in Germany and 5 p.m. in Kenya and Tanzania. An increasing number of members connect through their Smartphones.

We read the Gospel of the following Sunday following the “Steps in the Weekly *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection/*Bible*—Life Connections Service of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa.” A key part is connecting the Gospel passage to our everyday life and having a “take way” (practical follow-up or follow-down) that we share at the end of our meeting.⁹⁴⁹ One member stated:

The idea of people from different parts of the world and different works and life sharing their experiences is very enriching. It brings out the multifaceted aspect of the Word of God and the fact that the Word of God is relevant to all people of all nations and races.⁹⁵⁰

Over the last eight years a bonding and solidarity has developed among the members of our Online Skype SCC. We see ourselves as an online SCC prayer family following the adage *The family that prays together stays together*. Even when a person misses a weekly meeting, he or she reads the Gospel of the following Sunday privately ahead of time and feels “connected in spirit and prayer” to the online group when it meets.⁹⁵¹ Members who cannot join the online Skype session in person send an email message on the Gospel passage

⁹⁴⁸ This SCC has emerged as a key to of my spirituality and biblical reflection. By meeting every Tuesday I have five days to read, pray over and reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday. This insures that I am at least a Sunday Lectionary-based Catholic. In additional I may join another SCC (a physical SCC) during the week to reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday.

⁹⁴⁹ As a concrete example: on Tuesday, 11 September, 2018 we reflected on the Gospel of the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B: *Mark* 8: 27-35. My mantra was Jesus’s question to his disciples: “Who do you say that I am?” My take away was that in the next week I would ask young people in Nairobi: “You African young people, who do you say that I am?”

⁹⁵⁰Genevieve Nneoma Ihenacho, SHCJ, “Small Christian Community Practicum Write-up,” Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2013, p. 1.

⁹⁵¹ For me personally this every Tuesday Skype *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection group is a important fixed point in my spiritual life just like the daily masses in the Gleason House at the Maryknoll Headquarters in Nairobi, Kenya. This sharing helps me a lot to prepare my homilies for the following Sunday.

including the mantra of the week for other members to read ahead of time. These messages are also read during the weekly online sessions themselves. These messages are sometimes posted on the SCCs Facebook Page. These messages are sometimes used in the members' local SCCs.

One member wrote:

Unfortunately, due to my work schedule, it's nearly impossible to make it to an online session with our group. I do miss all of you and think of you often. I see the emails each week and am grateful to still be a part of our Online Skype SCC family, although I haven't been "present" for quite some time now. I hope all is well with each and every one of you, your families and your communities.⁹⁵²

The *Bible* Sharing and *Bible* Reflections on Skype on Tuesday are very helpful to members in an ongoing process.

1. In the "Touchdown Step" we share our experiences from the previous week.
2. In the "Take Away Step" we choose an action to carry out in the following week.

Skype SCC members themselves benefit a great deal from the sessions.

1. For personal, private prayer and reflection. Choosing a particular word or phrase or verse from the Gospel of the following Sunday as a *Bible* mantra or prayer mantra during the day can nourish and sustain a person all during the week
2. Some use the ideas and material in his or her regular SCC weekly meeting.
3. Others use the ideas and material in homilies, sermons, retreats and talks.
4. One Skype SCC member coordinates the preparation of the lectors in her parish on Saturday morning in reading aloud, and then reflecting on, the Scripture readings of the following day.

We continue to have many ongoing technical challenges and struggles with issues of changes of email addresses, electricity, limited finances, local internet connectivity, Skype updates, timing, traveling, etc. When the three moderators are all busy or traveling and there is no possibility of a live, online Skype Meeting that week, then this is a unique opportunity for our Skype SCC members to share their *Bible* Reflections by email or some other type of social media.

Video Conferencing can also be set up through Zoom, Cisco Webex, Facebook, Google Chat, Google Hang Outs, Go to Meeting and Yahoo Chat.

Kenyan Elizabeth Kiarie describes a new type of Phone SCC of Kenya Catholics living in the USA. Approximately 15 members meet on a free, online Conference Call. People from the Boston Area, Houston, Texas and other places dial into a special number at 8 p.m. on Fridays. During the 1 and ¼ hours audio session they read the Gospel of the following Sunday or a special Gospel requested by one of the members. They discuss their daily lives and common events. Right after the call as part of their outreach, several members may visit a sick person in a nearby hospital.

⁹⁵² Jennifer Ehrentraut, email message to Skype SCC members, 1 November, 2015.

Our research shows that people join an Online SCC for a variety of reasons: their complicated work schedules; they are unable to participate in the ordinary weekly SCCs in their parishes; they travel a great deal; they would like a more variety in the membership of their community; and they would like to focus more on a specific part of a SCC like reflecting on the Gospel.

There are many internet options. The [BibleGateway Website](http://www.Biblegateway.com) (<http://www.Biblegateway.com>) has 32 searchable versions of the Bible in English. The fastest way to find a *Bible* passage is to search on Google. Insightful commentaries on the daily and Sunday Scripture readings are found on:

[Daily Gospel](http://dailygospel.org/main.php?language=AM) (<http://dailygospel.org/main.php?language=AM>)

[Sacred Space](http://www.sacredspace.ie) (<http://www.sacredspace.ie>)

[iBreviary](http://www.ibreviary.org/en) (<http://www.ibreviary.org/en>)

[FaithND](http://faith.nd.edu/s/1210/faith/start.aspx?gid=609&pgid=61) (<http://faith.nd.edu/s/1210/faith/start.aspx?gid=609&pgid=61>)

FaithND – an outreach of the University of Notre Dame Alumni Association, South Bend, Indiana, USA --is a particularly good example of daily lectionary-based faith sharing by an individual. The contributors are dedicated lay people connected to Notre Dame: alumni (men and women) from both undergraduate and graduate levels, current students, parents and friends. The reflections come from deep personal experience and connect the Gospel to our daily lives. Often the reflections give a fresh perspective and insight on a Gospel passage. An example is this reflection by Notre Dame alumna Danielle Bianchi '05, '07 MA on *John* 17:11-19 (Wednesday of the Seventh Week of Easter – Year B) that was posted on the FaithND Website on 20 May, 2015:

As a parent, Jesus' prayer in today's Gospel resonates with my own nightly petitions. Jesus asks the Father to protect his disciples once he is no longer with them, and likewise I ask God to protect the ones [my children] who have been given to me. I pray that God will watch over each of my children and keep them safe, especially during the times when I am not with them. But as I contemplate Jesus' prayer more deeply, I recognize an important distinction. My prayers for my children always include their physical protection, that they will remain safe from illness or harm.

Jesus, however, actually asks for his disciples to not be taken out of this world, knowing that it presents very real and imminent danger for them. He focuses instead on their spiritual protection, that they will be guarded from the temptation to choose the ways of the world over the way of truth. Ultimately, God has entrusted my children to me for a time so that I may help lead them to heaven. As daunting as this responsibility is, I find comfort in knowing that God is always willing to assist us in fulfilling our vocations. I can follow Jesus' model of prayer by invoking and trusting in God's spiritual protection over my children as I send them out into the world.

My role as a disciple, then, is to be open to the process of sanctification that Jesus made possible—to continually allow God's word to transform and strengthen me so I can choose the way of truth. And with God's grace, I will better be able to guide my children in their own paths to holiness, so we may hopefully one day share together in Jesus' joy completely. - See more at:

<http://faith.nd.edu/s/1210/faith/social.aspx?sid=1210&gid=609&pgid=24909#sthash.wgTTNr7Y.dpuf>

Other examples are cited throughout this Ebook. FaithND Website Archives are available from 2015 to the present. Some people say that they have automatically downloaded the link to their smartphones so the Gospel passage and reflection is the first item they read when they wakes up – a kind of Morning Prayer. The website has a Forum Page where visitors can add their reflections and comments.

SCC members in Africa get daily *Bible* passages in different languages in written or spoken form from online websites and cellphones and as text messages and audio messages on cellphones such as the eGospel and iMissal Apps and separate audio devices such as Go Bible Traveller. A user friendly method is to automatically get the daily readings and commentary on one's cell phone and computer every morning. Some members download the *Bible* and other resources on their Smart Phones. Skype can be used for SCCs training sessions, counselling,⁹⁵³ video conferencing, meetings, online chats⁹⁵⁴ and overall networking.

c. Interactive Radio and Television Programs

Related to our Online SCCs on the internet is a Real Time Radio SCCs that can be also being heard on internet or web radio. Radio Amani, the Catholic FM Radio Station in Nakuru Diocese, Kenya has a live Swahili program called “Jumuiya ya Amani Usiku (“A SCC of Peace at Night”) every Thursday between 9 and 10 p.m. It is like a radio talk show with about 500 listeners. The producer is Benedict Ogola Mjomba. This Radio SCC follows the seven SCC steps of Lumko. After the Gospel of the following Sunday is read twice, about 15-20 listeners phone in their reflections that are broadcast live. Other listeners send SMS text messages to the producer who reads them live on the air. Participants try to connect the Gospel to daily life. The FM Station reaches listeners in a 70 kilometer square area including doctors, factory workers, night watchmen/women, nurses, patients in hospitals and students. Others listen to the program on the [Radio Amani](http://www.radioamani.co.ke) Website (www.radioamani.co.ke) and through Skype.⁹⁵⁵

The principle behind these new types of SCCs is the same as the regular SCCs that meet “physically” together: faithfulness and consistency in the weekly online meetings/posting of *Bible* reflections and in other activities of our SCC such as praying for special intentions. This includes making connections to our daily lives. What makes this experience

⁹⁵³ Marriage Counselors use Skype for the pastoral visit with couples connected to the Pre-Cana process.

⁹⁵⁴ From RENEW International: “What a wonderful opportunity for sharing across cultures!” (on a Skype Video Chat between four children, two religious sisters and one SCC lay leader from the Amani na Wema (“Peace and Goodness”) Home in St. Kizito SCC in St. Austin's Parish, Nairobi, Kenya sharing with 37 children and two teachers from the Fifth Grade at St. Patrick's School, Chatham, New Jersey, USA on 30 April 2013).

⁹⁵⁵ Based on Kenyan layman Benedict Ogola Mjomba's conversation with the author on a cellphone in Nairobi, Kenya on 6 March, 2012.

of being a new way of being church “different” is sharing reflections as a member of an online SCC. Our focus is not on general *Bible Study/Sharing/Reflection*, but doing it in a focused way as an Online SCC member, as part of a small cyberspace community that interacts together.

Another expression of social networking is live radio talk shows on SCCs that are both participatory and interactive. Examples are: the Gikuyu program "*Ukumio: Kuina ni Kuhoya Keeri*" ("Praise: To Sing Is To Pray Twice")⁹⁵⁶ broadcasts from 9 a.m. to 12 Noon on Sundays on CORO FM on the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) as well as on DSTV Audio Channel 110. The English and Swahili program "Waumini Soul Food" ("Spiritual Nourishment for the Christian Faithful") broadcasts daily in the morning on Radio Waumini. Both are based in Nairobi, Kenya. The Swahili program *Misa Mix/Zaburi* (Swahili for *Mass Mixed with Psalms*) on Radio Akicha in Lodwar Diocese, Kenya. Kenyan laywoman and broadcaster Mary Tioko reports: "We have a radio program on SCCs every Sunday during the Catholic musical program. Listeners call in to the radio to share their challenges and now they can strengthen each other in the faith."⁹⁵⁷

Specialists on SCCs join the producer/moderator in the studio to listen to comments and to answer questions sent by listeners on the phone, through SMS messages on cellphones, on email and on Facebook Pages on the internet. Listeners who call in or write in begin by saying: "I am _____. I belong to _____ SCC in _____ Parish. Listeners ask questions and comment on the theme of the day such as "Leadership on the SCCs," "SCC Members' Involvement in Civic Education in Kenya," "Patron/Patroness Saints of the SCCs" and "SCCs Celebrating the 2012-2013 Year of Faith." Listeners share their personal experiences of SCCs and learn from other people's experiences. One listener called these radio programs "a school of learning." It is a particularly good way of explaining how SCCs are a new way of being church in Africa.

Radio Waumini with headquarters in Nairobi provides a service of Daily Spiritual Nourishment to cell phone users. The "Daily Scripture Readings" of the Liturgical Calendar of the Catholic Church and Gospel verse references in English, Swahili, Gikuyu, and Luo are available by sending a text message (SMS) with the word "SOMO" to 20188. Thus interested people can access the *Bible* any time they want.

Here is a Case Study of how the Gikuyu radio program is integrated into a weekly SCC meeting in St. Paul Catholic Church in Kangaita Village near Nanyuki, Kenya:

We troop to Mariamu (an old woman who has been blinded by diabetes)'s home. She is kept company and assisted by her granddaughter. We sit in a circle outside her hut. A small transistor radio is hung from a tree in the compound. It is tuned to CORO FM Radio. They are listening to the radio program conducted on Sunday morning by Martin Kamande. You are baffled. You have not been able to listen to this program before as you are usually in church at that time. You have even often times wondered who actually listens

⁹⁵⁶ To get the Catholic Mass daily readings and the Saint of the Day straight in one's cellphone: SMS the word MASS to 21234. Powered by Ukumio.

⁹⁵⁷ Mary Tioko in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 1 November, 2013.

to the program while most of the faithful are presumably in church at the time the program is aired. Here goes your answer: Old Mariamu and her daughter, and countless other faithful who in one way or another are unable to go to church, or had gone for the early morning church service. You feel guilty. Forgive us Lord for our inequities and being judgmental to a worthwhile program. The radio is switched off. The meeting of the *Jumuiya* begins.⁹⁵⁸

Tumaini Media in Dar es Salaam Archdiocese, Tanzania promotes the importance of SCCs through many interactive communications media. Radio Tumaini has a wide variety of Swahili programs that discuss SCCs including “Maisha” (“Life”) and “Sisi Sote Ni Wamisionari” (“We Are All Missionaries”). Tumaini TV produces a weekly 45-minute Swahili television program called “Ijue Parokia” (“Know Your Parish”) that includes on-site interviews with SCC members in various parishes in Dar es Salaam Archdiocese.

Radio Maria is a mainly Chewa-speaking FM Radio Station in Mangochi Diocese, Malawi. It has programs aired on SCCs that captured the activities of SCCs and how they move forward. Topics include the composition of the membership of SCCs and the election of SCCs leaders.⁹⁵⁹

In another technical innovation related to SCCs, Lusaka Archdiocese, Zambia has pioneered in the use of “proclaimers.” Small black audio devices donated by the Bible Society of Zambia contain a clearing recording of the *New Testament* in English and local Zambia languages such as Bemba, Nyanja and Tonga. Following the principle of “faith comes by hearing” SCC members listen to a voice recording of the Gospel of the following Sunday in their weekly meetings of *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection*. Zambian lay catechizer (a partially trained catechist) Mrs. Judith Phiri explains how in her home on Saturday from 7 to 8:30 pm, she gathers her five children and the children of her neighbors. They listen to a voice recording of the Gospel of the next day and then they discuss the meaning for their daily lives. The children never seem to get tired and enjoy this new way of learning about the *Bible*.⁹⁶⁰

Residents of Southern Africa get a taste of small community Faith-sharing on a radio program broadcast twice a week on Radio Veritas, a Catholic broadcast station and website. The program is the brainchild of Duncan Hyam, coordinator of RENEW Africa and Why Catholic? in the Archdiocese of Johannesburg, South Africa. The recorded one-hour programs, which Duncan produces and hosts, feature a pre-rehearsed small community Faith-sharing with one of the RENEW resources. Various language groups of South Africa participate. The program runs continuously rather than in seasons, and will eventually use

⁹⁵⁸ Paul Njuki, “The Village and Church as a Family,” *Imani Yetu (Faith Transforming Society)* Blog, retrieved on 17 July, 2012, <http://imaniyetu.wordpress.com/2012/07/16/the-village-and-church-as-a-family>

⁹⁵⁹ Father Peter Mkhwayi in a conversation with the author in Lilongwe, Malawi on 18 December, 2013.

⁹⁶⁰ Mrs. Judith Phiri in a conversation with the author in Lusaka, Zambia on 6 December, 2013.

Lenten Longings, At Prayer with Mary, and ARISE. Listeners who own the RENEW Faith-sharing books will be invited to follow along.⁹⁶¹

A new initiative in using the internet to make known SCCs in Africa is the multimedia approach in promoting the Beatification Process of Cardinal Maurice Michael Otunga in Nairobi Archdiocese and throughout Kenya. Many SCCs in Kenya have Cardinal Otunga as their Patron. These include SCCs in parishes (for example, Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Nairobi Archdiocese) and in schools (for example, Christ the Teacher Parish, Kenyatta University, Nairobi Archdiocese, Hekima University College, Nairobi Archdiocese and Tangaza University College, Nairobi Archdiocese).⁹⁶²

We have sent the following message to different Facebook Pages such as the Small Christian Communities Facebook Pages, the Fans of Ukumio Facebook Page, etc.:

For those Fans of this Facebook Page in the Nairobi Area there will be a Fundraising Walk for the beatification of Cardinal Maurice Otunga on Saturday, 15 September, 2012 starting at Holy Family Basilica at 7:30 a.m. All SCC members are invited to walk behind a banner that reads: “Cardinal Otunga SCCs.” Please spread the word.

These same Facebook Pages promote the radio programs devoted to SCCs mentioned above especially the monthly *Mwaki* Program on CORO FM and other media like the *2013 and 2014 Cardinal Otunga Calendar*.

d. Promoting the Voices of Women, Youth and the Marginated. The internet is described as the great equalizer, the great leveler, democracy in action.

Our SCCs team is finding ways of promoting more participation of women through our SCCs Website. A search on our website on 12 May, 2014 revealed 51 references (hits) -- 10 for “woman” and 41 for “women.”

There is also more focus on youth. Traditionally we would connect with Catholic youth in the parish (a physical, territorial, geographical place) or a home. Youth would “meet” in the parish or home. But now youth “meet” or “congregate” in cyberspace, on the internet, through social networking on their smartphones. With less emphasis on computers and more on interactive smartphones they are less likely to be in a cybercafé and more likely to be in cyberspace. Go to a physical “place” like Tangaza University College. What are young people doing while eating lunch in the cafeteria? Talking or reading. No. They are mainly texting messages to friends, using WhatsApp, Facebook and Twitter and checking social media websites. What are young people doing while waiting in their van in front of the college to take them home? Reading a book or talking with friend? No. They are busy in cyberspace.

American Maryknoll missionary priest and internet expert Father David Smith, MM states:

⁹⁶¹ “WORLD Renew” Email dated 28 April, 2017.

⁹⁶² See Francis Njuguna, “SCCs...In Efforts to Honor Cardinal Otunga,” *National Mirror*, 1:4 (April, 2013), 18.

An even more radical advancement for our online presence is to see the web not simply as a communication tool but more as a “place” in which to engage in mission. We need missionaries who enter into this new (virtual) culture, learn the language, learn how to build relationships, and how to evangelize/bring the Gospel there. The internet is where we can now encounter those who have not heard the Good News – or who have become disenchanted with traditional forms of religion. How do we speak to them? How is God calling us to be in mission among these citizens of the world wide web, so that God might touch their hearts, too?⁹⁶³

So we have to meet today’s African youth in cyberspace and on the internet -- in their new “places” and “spaces.” See also the theme and explanation of Pope Benedict XVI’s *Message for 2013 World Communications Day* on 12 May, 2013: “Social Networks: Portals of Truth and Faith; New Spaces for Evangelization.”

The margined (a cover term for the poor and excluded) also have a platform. One concrete way is developing a [SCCs Stories Database](#) that uses the MySQL (Structured Query Language) online database management software to provide searchable, user-friendly, online access to a collection of African SCC stories. These online stories give a voice to women, youth and the margined in Africa in different ways. There is a power, an energy, a release, a healing, a transformation that comes in telling and sharing one’s story. Storytelling is an importance source of African Narrative Theology.

e. Moodle is the name of the Tangaza University College (Nairobi, Kenya) Virtual Learning Environment. It includes the course “Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today” (PTC418) <http://moodle.tangaza.org/course/view.php?id=98>. Moodle is a free, open source eLearning software platform that is also known as a Course Management System (CMS), a Learning Management System (LMS) or a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE). Moodle helps educators create online courses with a focus on interaction and collaborative construction of content. It is a free web application to create effective online learning sites. Moodle is located on the Tangaza University College Server and needs a password for access. Visitors who are not enrolled in the SCC course can participate as guests. Hopefully people who are interested in SCCs but are not students at Tangaza University College will eventually be able to participate in this online, long distance learning.

f. Online SCCs Resources. With the internet we become a Global Electronic Village. There are many SCCs websites and Facebook pages. Many have content about African SCCs. Many more have content and resources that are useful to African SCCs, For example, [Small Groups.com](#)⁹⁶⁴ has training materials and practical suggestions on *Bible Study*, community, leadership, ministry, mission, prayer and small-group retreats.

⁹⁶³ David Smith in an email message to the author dated 12 May, 2014.

⁹⁶⁴ Two examples from its website: “Our newly updated resource, [Ministering to Difficult Group Members](#), will help you handle the people who talk too much, talk too little, give too much advice, promote false theology, encourage tangents, and so much more. It's filled to the brim with practical tips that you can immediately implement in your group.” Small Groups Website, retrieved on 4 May, 2013.” [Top 10 Small Group Training Tools of 2014](#), retrieved on 26 November, 2014.

RENEW International with wide experience throughout the world including Burundi and South Africa (Port Elizabeth Diocese and Johannesburg Archdiocese)⁹⁶⁵ has many Faith-sharing resources.⁹⁶⁶ “The World as Our Neighbor” is a six-part global justice reflection series from Catholic Relief Services and RENEW International. It explores pressing issues of our day through the lenses of prayer, scripture and Catholic social teaching. These reflection guides are ideally suited for small Faith-sharing communities in parishes and other groups. Each session includes real-life stories of people who experienced challenges of global concern, presented in written or video form. Session topics available for download include: Global Solidarity, Fair Trade, Hunger, Migration, HIV AND AIDS and Peacebuilding. The series is available for college and university students as “The World on Campus.”

Presentation Ministries (PM)⁹⁶⁷ has a variety of SCCs resources especially a seminar training program designed to lead participants into joining or forming a Small Christian Community and to create home-based communities. These resources are available in printed guidebooks and manuals as well as on audio and video tape.

⁹⁶⁵ RENEW International has produced a very nice video of 12 minutes called "Discussion on Global Small Christian Communities especially in Africa: Small Christian Communities in Africa and Beyond: A Conversation between Sr. Marie Cooper and Fr. Joe Healey, MM". November, 2012. You can find it on our SCCs Website under "Videos" at:

<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/videos/228-discussion-on-global-small-christian-communities-especially-in-africa.html>

⁹⁶⁶ See *Sowing Seeds: Essentials for Small Community Leaders* offers a comprehensive collection of pastoral insights and practical suggestions to help small community leaders guide their groups in a way that nourishes spiritual growth. Culled from RENEW International's over three decades of experience in pioneering and promoting Small Christian Communities, this book overflows with simple but effective ideas and strategies that will enhance the way these groups reflect on and respond to the gospel. The book offers tips for how to lead small community Faith-sharing. *PrayerTime* provides the weekly Sunday Gospel readings in a format conducive to Faith-sharing. *Why Catholic? Journey Through the Catechism* is a parish-based process of evangelization and adult faith formation through Small Christian Communities.

The newest outreach is *RENEW Africa* that is a dynamic, engaging process for the spiritual renewal of parishes, built on the faith experiences of Africans in their daily lives, and centered on Faith-sharing within small Christian communities. The overall theme is “Gathered as God’s Family” <http://www.renewintl.org/renewafrica>

⁹⁶⁷ Our Lady of Presentation Communities and Ministries is the full title given to a seven-year-old Catholic organization that started in March, 1992 when it received the status of Lay Association under canon law by Archbishop Pilarczyk of Cincinnati, Ohio, USA. The two components, ministries and home-based communities, exist to disciple Catholics more deeply for Christ, through teaching the word of God and equipping all for Christian ministry using the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Teachings on the daily eucharistic readings, and encouragement to receive Jesus in daily Holy Communion are emphasized to such an extent that one could cite a secondary influence in the church as a "daily Mass movement."

The theme of Pope Benedict XVI's *Message for 2013 World Communications Day* on 12 May, 2013 is: "Social Networks: Portals of Truth and Faith; New Spaces for Evangelization."⁹⁶⁸ The digital environment is a reality in the lives of many people. It is not some sort of parallel or merely virtual world but is an existential environment where people live and move. Using a metaphor, it is a "continent" where the Church must be present and where believers, if they are to be authentic in their presence, will seek to share with others the deepest source of their joy and hope, Jesus Christ. This is a clear call to SCCs in Africa to use the social networks actively and to enter into these new spaces for evangelization. The forums created by the social networks allows us to share the truth that the Lord has passed to His Church, to listen to others, to learn about their cares and concerns, to understand who they are and for what they are searching.

Truly in the world of internet and cyberspace the future is now. New SCC ideas, projects and networks will emerge as *we create the path by walking*. As we try new ways and learn from each other's "new paths," Alphonse Omolo comments:

We are inspired by similar experiences with our international students SCC in Germany – "parishes without borders." They meet every week and share the Gospel of the following Sunday. Another inspiring experience is the International Online SCC group, meeting weekly via Skype and using a similar *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* approach. I believe we are challenged to "cast our nets deeper" -- effectively using emerging opportunities as SCCs continue to "spread the Church beyond its borders."⁹⁶⁹

So SCC members are challenged to learn and use the new language of the internet and social media. American lay writer Amy Woolam Echeverria explains:

Today we Google and tweet our way through learning, relationships, work and life. This is a new language which like any other language must be studied and practiced if we hope to have any fluency. It brings new meaning to, "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to all creation" (*Mark 16:15*). But why should we and the [Catholic] Church make the effort to learn and use this language? The same reason that Jesus told parables and that Paul wrote letters because each age has its tools for evangelization, each audience has its ears to hear. The message is meaningless unless it can be spoken and delivered in a way that the audience can meaningfully hear it. From storytelling and the written word, to radio, TV, and now the internet and social media, the

⁹⁶⁸ "Since the first papal tweet was sent by Pope Benedict XVI on 12 December, 2012 over 6 million followers have joined. The account, which was deactivated during *Sede Vacante*, was reopened after Pope Francis' election and the numbers continue to rise. Francis has continued Benedict's lead in reaching out to the world through the use of social networks. As of now the @Pontifex account post tweets in him in nine languages on Twitter: English, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, French, Germany, Latin, Polish and Arabic. "Zenit: The World Seen From Rome Daily Email Dispatch," 9 May 2013. As of March, 2014 Pope Francis is riding high on social media, with 11 million following him on Twitter.

⁹⁶⁹ Alphonse Omolo, email message to the author, 28 April. 2013.

[Catholic] Church is challenged to speak the language of its day without losing its core message of justice, love, peace, and right relationships. Using social media is one way we can challenge structures and change lives in ways that reflect our missionary calling to be inclusively cross-cultural... Ultimately social media is a tool for evangelization, an e-vite to bringing the Gospel to our world. As missionaries we understand the importance of meeting people where they are and using the language that speaks to their heart. Creating an online community for people to encounter Christ is as valid today as Paul's Home [House] Churches were for early Christians.⁹⁷⁰

Part of the reason that we describe the internet as “the future is now” is the creation and development of online SCCs. We can call them Online House Churches. They particularly appeal to young people.

On our 2014 SCCs Class exam at Tangaza University College and Don Bosco Utume Salesian Theological College I asked a question about the importance and influence of the internet and the social media/new media/social networking in relation to SCCs in Africa. Some answers:

- Recently when responding to the fire in the Fuatanyayo section of Queen of Peace Parish in Nairobi cellphones were very handy in tracking the movement of the smoke, in locating children and in coordinating other responses.
- Christians who don't have enough time to join a physical SCC can participate in an online SCC.
- While youth find long meetings and prayer sessions boring, they can participate more actively through social media.
- The internet and social media can keep SCC leaders and animators in Eastern Africa updated on what is happening in the Global Church. Having updated themselves they can deliver good services to other SCCs members.
- Chat Groups or Chat Forums such as WhatsApp can connect SCC members.
- Lumko should open a Facebook Page for SCC training and conversations.
- Online instruction manuals are available for SCC leaders to learn many things.
- There are online classes through video conference calls.
- SCC leaders can access webinars that have training and empowerment programs.
- Via YouTube SCC leaders can practice new methods and techniques.
- Through the internet SCCs members sharing the joy of the Gospel and our faith with people who are far away.
- St. Paul's words can be written: “Woe to me if I don't preach the Gospel and evangelize through social media.”
- When you talk to Americans about SCCs in Eastern Africa they may think that they are “flying horses.” But when you share the Gospel of the following Sunday on Facebook they realize that SCCs are “walking horses,” that is, a reality.
- People who live in Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia where Christianity cannot be practiced publically can participate in a SCC though the internet.

⁹⁷⁰ Amy Woolam Echeverria, “But Why Should We and the Church Learn This Language?” *Mission Update*, Volume 22; Issue 3 (Autumn 2013), United States Catholic Mission Association (USCMA) Website, retrieved on 21 October, 2013, http://www.uscatholicmission.org/files/usatholicmission/files/Mission%20Updates/Mission_Update_v22-3_autumn_2013.pdf

At these two colleges and other schools associated with CUEA I have taken online learning a step further. In January, 2014 I began teaching the SCCs Course using *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*, one the main Resource and Reference Books, as a free online Ebook. First, I posted it on the SCCs Website as an Ebook in the pdf format. With monthly updates it is 596 pages as of 1 April, 2014. Then I downloaded it on the local internal servers of the various colleges for quick access. Then I encouraged the students to download it on one of their own electronic reading devices stating:

This free online Ebook is only 4.5 MB. It can be downloaded (saved) on any electronic reading device such as a desktop computer, laptop computer, external hard drive, flash drive, Ipad, tablet, Ereader like Kindle, Nook, Blio, Google, etc. Follow the download instructions on each browser.

Then I use the online version in class via my laptop and a video projector on a big screen. Short input in class on a particular topic is following by interactive questions and answers and discussion.

More and more SCCs are using a wide variety of instant messaging systems. The most popular and fastest growing is WhatsApp (simple, personal, real time messaging) that has SCCs called Group Chats. WhatsApp is an instant messaging app for smartphones that operates under a subscription business model. The proprietary, cross-platform app uses the internet to send text messages, images, video, user location and audio media messages.

In January 2015, WhatsApp was the most globally popular messaging app with more than 700 million active users,⁹⁷¹ with India alone having a user base of more than 70 million.⁹⁷² Mobile messaging app WhatsApp hit one billion ‘monthly active users’ in February, 2016., Its closest competitor, Facebook’s Internet Messenger, had around 700 million users. Figures for Africa: **ADD**

A recent exchange on the Holy Cross Youth Dandora Facebook Page:

”We are 645 members in this group, but we only manage to get one post per week. When was the last time you posted something on this page? I would like to know...”

“WhatsApp imemaliza Facebook!!! (Swahili for “WhatsApp has finished off Facebook”). “So WhatsApp is better than Facebook? I wonder.

“We can create a WhatsApp group that is an easy place to get people.”

”It’s understandable that things are changing. The reading culture nowadays is terrible. People are moving from long posts on Facebook to shorter SMs that WhatsApp accommodates. For me a group should not only be entertaining but educative. To me WhatsApp is more of

⁹⁷¹ This messaging service jumped to 800 million active users in April, 2015. It allows you to text other users for free. The app sends messages over the internet, bypassing a phone carrier’s text messaging charges.

⁹⁷² Wikipedia Website, retrieved on 16 April, 2015, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/WhatsApp>

catching-up, vibe & sometimes rumor-mongering. The educational part for which I thirst for is hardly catered for. But maybe I'm too old school.”

More and more SCCs are starting WhatsApp Group Chat Pages just for their members (private) to use as a medium to communicate both personal and general information. A particular SCC has its own App for contact information, daily scripture readings, places of meetings and announcement of SCC activities, notices of sicknesses and deaths, etc. A good example is the KUCC App.