

Small Christian Communities in Africa: Histories, Themes, Development and Challenges

By Joseph G. Healey, MM

I. Historical Development of Small Christian Communities/Basic Ecclesial Communities in Africa

At its 6th Plenary Assembly from 20 November to 2 December, 1961 the Congolese Episcopal Conference (hereafter called by its present name the Democratic Republic of the Congo or DRC) approved a pastoral plan to promote "Living Ecclesial Communities" (also called "Living Christian Communities"). 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 and hospitals). These Living Ecclesial Communities were said to be the only way to make the church more "African" and close to the people. So, the very first Small Christian Communities (SCCs)¹ in Africa started in DRC in 1961.

Then came the historic [Second Vatican Council](#) (1962-65). Latin America, Africa and Asia (especially the Philippines) all pioneered the development of a SCC/BCC/BEC 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 South *simultaneously* experienced the extraordinary growth of SCCs. Thus, contrary to some misinformed interpretations, the African experience did not come from Latin America, but developed on its own. African SCCs have developed mainly as a pastoral, parish-based model in a local African context. They are called "the church in the neighborhood."

In a symposium in Germany in 2013 Democratic Republic of the Congo theologian Sister José Ngala, RSA stated that the Basic Christian Communities were a response to basic African intuitions and a desire to root Christianity in an African reality.²

¹ Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is an umbrella term used in this essay and is the common expression for this new way of being/becoming church in Africa. Even some writers in French prefer the term SCC because it indicates the "scale" of the communities. Different terms are used on the continent of Africa. BCC means Basic Christian Community. BEC means Base or Basic Ecclesial Community. CEB means Communautés Ecclésiale de Base. CEVB means Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes de Base.

² Ngala, José, "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, Academia.edu Website, retrieved 20 August, 2014,

At this same symposium German lay theologian 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 *Herder Korrespondenz*, 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 official pastoral plan with such an option dates back to 1962."³

During the 1973 [AMECEA](#)⁴ Study Conference the word "small" was specifically chosen to avoid certain undertones of the word "basic." Bishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana'a Nzeki (later Archbishop of Nairobi, Kenya) 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.⁵

Archbishop Jean-Marie Speich, the former 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

https://www.academia.edu/6456909/HISTORY_DEVELOPMENT_AND_STATU_QUO_OF_BASIC_CHRISTIAN

³ Marco Moerschbacher, "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, 200-204, retrieved 14 February, 2016, <http://www.conspiration.de/texte/english/2013/moerschbacher-e.html>

⁴ AMECEA is an acronym for "Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa." It is a service organization for the National Episcopal Conferences of the nine English-speaking countries of Eastern Africa, namely Eritrea (1993), Ethiopia (1979), Kenya (1961), Malawi (1961), South Sudan (2011), Sudan (1973), Tanzania (1961), Uganda (1961) and Zambia (1961). The Republic of South Sudan became independent on 9 July, 2011, but the two Sudans remain part of one Episcopal Conference. Somalia (1995) and Djibouti (2002) are Affiliate Members. AMECEA is one of the eight Regional Episcopal Conferences of [SECAM](#) (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar).

⁵ Raphael Ndingi, "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, 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

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.”⁶

Irish priest theologian James O’Halloran, SDB confirms this by saying:

During the 1971 [World] Synod of Bishops 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 [SCCs] groups began. They sprang up spontaneously throughout the world at roughly the same historical period by the power of the Holy Spirit.⁷

The very beginning of SCCs in Eastern Africa can be traced back to the parishes of the Luo-speaking Deanery (especially Nyarombo, Ingri and Masonga Parishes) in North Mara in Musoma Diocese in northwestern Tanzania in 1966. This began with research on the social structures and community values of the [African Initiated Churches \(AICs\)](#) (also called African Independent Churches and African Indigenous Churches), among the Luo Ethnic Group. The first terms used were *chama* (meaning "small group") and “small communities of Christians” (forerunner of SCCs). The Maryknoll missionaries focused on the formation of natural communities of Luo people living in local cultural families and extended families. By 1968 Nyarombo Parish had 20 small communities and five were started in a nearby parish. During the Seminar Study Year (SSY) in Tanzania in 1969 the concept and praxis of SCCs that were then called "local Church communities" were first articulated as a priority in both rural and later urban parishes.

The 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 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 the laity and “the People of God.” No. 17 of *Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church*

⁶ Jean-Marie Speich, *Catholic News Agency for Africa (CANAA)*, 27 November, 2014.

⁷ James O’Halloran, *Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Companion*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books and Dublin: Columba Press, 1996: 23.

of the Church) refers to the Trinitarian understanding of the church as “the People of God,⁸ the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.”⁹

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.¹⁰ 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.

The bishops of the neighboring Republic of the Congo closely followed DRC’s leadership in their 1973 meeting. SCCs were built upon the extended family. In 1974 the Episcopal Conference of Cameroon followed suit. The expatriate missionaries in Northern Cameroon and neighboring Chad had already begun to channel the first evangelization into SCCs. In war-torn Burundi and Rwanda, a similar six-year renewal plan was conceived in 1976 uniting people on every hill into “community meetings.” In Francophone West Africa the lead was taken by Burkina Faso in order that each and every one would feel truly part of and fully responsible for the church as a family (1977). The South African Catholic Bishops Conference made a decisive step in the same direction in 1975.

⁸ Meaning of the “People of God:” It is 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.

⁹ 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

¹⁰ 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*.”

During the World Synod of Bishops in Rome in 1971 on “Justice in the World” the African delegates noted that SCCs already existed in Africa. At the World Synod of Bishops in Rome in 1977 on “Catechesis” the bishops in Africa declared themselves clearly in favor of SCCs.

The [AMECEA](#) Study Conference on “Planning for the Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s” in Nairobi, Kenya in December, 1973 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 and feel a sense of communal belonging, both in living and working.” 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-governing], self-propagating [self-spreading] and self-supporting [self-reliant and self-sustainable].”¹²

Two of the founders of SCCs in Eastern Africa were Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, MAfr, of Lilongwe Diocese, Malawi and Bishop Christopher Mwoleka of Rulenge Diocese, Tanzania.

The AMECEA Study Conference on “Building Small Christian Communities” took place in Nairobi, Kenya in 1976. The key statement was: “Systematic formation of Small Christian Communities should be the key pastoral priority in the years to come in Eastern Africa.” This is the single most important statement made about 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 to build are simply the most local incarnations of the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.”¹³

The Catholic bishops in Eastern Africa chose this SCC pastoral priority as the best way to build up the local churches. The three selfs mentioned above 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.

In 1975 Burkina Faso opted for the creation of SCCs on the model of Church as Family. Similar decisions were made by other Episcopal Conferences in Africa.

1978 saw the birth of *Bible Sharing/Gospel Sharing* at the Lumko Missiological Institute in South Africa. Excellent SCC training manuals began to be published that popularized the Lumko “Seven Steps” Method of *Bible Sharing/Gospel Sharing*. Altogether there are eight Gospel sharing methods that can be adapted to the local context and situation. These training manuals have been used throughout Africa.

¹² “Guidelines for the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s,” *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 16, No 1 & 2 (1974), 12.

¹³ AMECEA Study Conference on “Building Small Christian Communities,” “Conclusions,” *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, 18, 5 (October, 1976).

The AMECEA Study Conference on “The Implementation of the AMECEA Bishops’ Pastoral Priority of Building Small Christian Communities: An Evaluation” took place in Zomba, Malawi in 1979. 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.”¹⁴

The Bishops of Africa placed SCCs at the center of their pastoral strategy in two major [SECAM](#) (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) documents: *Justice and Evangelization in Africa* (Yaounde, Cameroon, 1981) and *Church and Human Development in Africa* (Kinshasa, DRC, 1984). Pastoral Centers in Africa have been very important in promoting this SCC Model of Church such as: AMECEA Pastoral Institute, Gaba, Eldoret, Kenya; Ave Maria Pastoral Center, Tzaneen, South Africa; Kenema Pastoral Center, Kenema, Sierra Leone; and Lumko Missiological Institute, Germiston, Delmenville, South Africa.

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 optional in our churches; they are central to the life of faith and the ministry of evangelization.”

A major step was the First African Synod 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”, “Dialogue”, “Justice and Peace” and the “Means of Social Communications.” 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). Bishop Francisco Joao Siloto of Chimoio Diocese, Mozambique said that “these communities are an expression of African communitarianism and the only true way of inculturation for the African Church.” Archbishop Cornelius Fontem Esua of Bamenda, Cameroon said that “it is necessary and urgent to put Sacred Scripture into the hands of the faithful so it can be the source and inspiration for the life and activities of Small Christian Communities.” Archbishop Zacchaeus 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.”¹⁵

1995 saw the publication and promulgation of St. Pope 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:

¹⁴ AMECEA, Conclusions of the Study Conference of the AMECEA Plenary 1979: *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 21 (1979).

¹⁵ Zacchaeus Okoth, “Eighth General Congregation,” *Ibid.*, 5-6. Afrika World Website, retrieved 24 August, 2012, <http://www.afrikaworld.net/synod/okoth.htm>

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. 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."

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-up 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 *missio*. 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. "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 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." This can also be seen in diocesan synods at the local level. The booklet for the Synod of Mwanza Archdiocese in Tanzania in 2002 contains 105 references to *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo za Kikristo* (JNNK), the Swahili expression for SCCs.

Next was the 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."

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 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*." Small Christian Communities are mentioned seven times in the “Final List of [57] Propositions.”

The Faculty of Theology of the Catholic University of the Congo under the patronage of the National Episcopal Conference of the Democratic Republic 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 solidarity with other parts of Africa, in the day devoted to “Other Experiences of CEVB in DRC and Elsewhere,” Father Pius Rutechura, the then Secretary General of AMECEA), 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.” Father Godefroid Manunga, SVD, the Director of the Lumko Missiological Institute, gave a paper on “The Experience of South Africa.”

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

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 struggle 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.

Number 133 under “The Church as the Presence of Christ:” “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.

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*. 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).”

COMMENTARY: This confirms the central place of *Bible* sharing and *Bible* reflection in the life of SCCs in Africa.

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.”

A SCCs Workshop on “How Small Christian Communities in Africa Receive 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 held¹⁶ 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.

English Bishop Colin Davies, MHM provided an interesting summary of this 1961 to 2018 period. Along with retired Ugandan Archbishop James Odongo, formerly of Tororo Archdiocese, Uganda and retired Tanzanian Bishop Gervase Nkalanga, formerly of Bukoba

¹⁶ After living 50 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 to 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.*

Diocese, Tanzania, 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 interview¹⁷ 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.

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:

Other Church institutions, basic communities and small communities, movements, and forms of association are a source of 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.

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. This was an opportunity to revisit Catholic Church history and learn from the past 50 years. From the perspective of SCCs in Eastern Africa we are rediscovering the importance of the two founders Kalilombe and Mwoleka. Their vision of the theology and praxis of Vatican II’s People of God Model of Church and Communion Ecclesiology helped create the path for the establishment and development of Eastern African SCCs.

II. Themes of Small Christian Communities in Africa

1. Relationships and Community:

To the question “What is the core value of SCCs?” SCCs members in Africa would answer “relationships.” Community values are basic to African life and the foundation of SCCs. When the retired Archbishop of Kumasi, Ghana Peter Sarpong was asked what is the central value of African society, he immediately answered in the single word “participation.”¹⁸ Participation is at the heart of the life and activities of SCCs. 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.”

¹⁷ Colin Davies in an interview with the author in Nairobi, Kenya, 24 March, 2012.

¹⁸ Peter Sarpong in a conversation with the author, Kampala, Uganda, 1 August, 1972.

The SCC way of life is seen in the context of Irish Theologian Father Brian Hearne, CSSp writing that “SCCs are essentially a spirituality.” This is developed by George Gichuhu in *The Spirituality of SCCs in Eastern Africa*. He treats the African value of community expressed in the conviction of the fundamental African proverb *I am because we are; we are because I am*. SCCs can be described as “Truly African, Truly Christian.”¹⁹ The spirituality of SCCs is rooted in Jesus Christ’s new commandment of love and service. SCC members live out their African Christian spirituality by reaching out to others, especially the poor and needy. In this service to the community, African SCCs integrate African values with gospel values.

2. Biblical:

a. The centrality of the *Bible* in SCCs in Africa:

The two essential characteristics of SCCs in Africa are *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection and practical action/outreach. There are many important *Bible* passages on community:

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.”

Matthew 18:20: “For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them.”

Acts 2:42-47 is a model of community life in African SCCs: Importance of the witness of life, praying together, breaking of the bread (sharing what we have) and Eucharist. This includes working together, praying together and sharing life just as the First Christian Communities.

Acts 4:32: “the community of believers was of one mind and heart.”

In these passages we find the biblical foundations of SCCs. We are called to truly live as the first Small Christian Communities in *Acts of the Apostles* did. Since SCCs are rooted 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.”²⁰

¹⁹ The theme of many conferences and symposia on the Catholic Church in Africa.

²⁰ I was vividly reminded of this “living history” when I visited the city of Philippi, an eastern Macedonia town that was 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), the predecessor of SCCs. *Acts of the Apostles* recounts how Lydia and her household were baptized and offered hospitality to the traveling preachers. Lydia’s house became the site for the Local Church in Philippi, with her as its hostess and perhaps leader.

Tanzanian priest theologian Laurenti 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* 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*.²¹

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

b. Specific manner/features of *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* in Africa.²²

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-based²³ 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.²⁴ *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,

²¹ Laurenti Magesa, “The Joy of Community in Small Christian Communities,” *New People*, No. 149, (March-April, 2014): 24.

²² At the 17th AMECEA Plenary Assembly in Nairobi, Kenya in June, 2011 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*.

²³ Some communities of religious sisters in Africa and other communities meet together daily, especially in the evening, to read and reflect on the Scripture Readings of the following day following the daily lectionary cycle.

²⁴ 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.

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].

Magesa further 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).²⁵

Among the basic SCCs E-Resource materials that are available free online on the [Small Christian Communities \(SCCs\) Website](#) are:

- i. “13 Steps in the Weekly *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection/*Bible*—Life Connections Service of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Africa.”
- ii. “Seven-Step Gospel Sharing (Lumko, South Africa).”
- iii. “The Process of *Lectio Divina*.”
- iv. “Using the ‘See,’ ‘Judge,’ and ‘Act’ Method/Process as Part of the Pastoral Spiral.”
- v. Other reflection methods of going from life to the *Bible*.

c. The *Bible* forms the foundation for the faith and life of SCC members in Africa with regard to such values such as like participation, solidarity and social justice. Examples are given throughout this essay.

3. Ecclesiastical:

After the historic [Second Vatican Council](#) (1962-65), Small Christian Communities developed as a result of putting the communion ecclesiology and teachings of Vatican II into practice. The founding fathers of AMECEA and other Episcopal Conferences in

²⁵ Laurenti Magesa, “The Joy of Community”: 26.

Africa had a vision that focused on the communion (*koinonia*) and service (*diakonia*) aspects and developed SCCs as a concrete expression of, and realization of, the Church as Family Model of Church.

This is rooted in the ecclesiology that SCCs are not optional, but are the basic unit/basic cell/basic building block/basic foundation/most local expression of the Catholic Church. That is why ideally one should greet *all* people as Small Christian Community members. SCCs are different from the traditional parish devotional groups, associations and sodalities that are voluntary and often based on international constitutions and guidelines. Even a priest or religious can become a member of the SCC in his specific neighborhood or geographical area (that is, where he or she is actually living).

Important themes are: First, communion ecclesiology -- the family, the SCC, the outstation, the sub-parish, the parish and the diocese reflect a “Communion of Communities Model of Church” starting from below, from the grassroots. Second, a People of God theology.

Regarding the “Ecclesiology of the Church as Family” the *Final Message of the Bishops of Africa to the People of God* at the end of the First African Synod 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.”

Magesa boldly states: "Ecclesiologically they (SCCs) are the best thing that has happened since the *New Testament*."³¹

4. Pastoral:

Most of the SCCs in Africa are pastoral, parish-based communities in the neighborhood. This distinguishes them from the social action and social justices model found in Latin America and parts of Asia. This has a very specific meaning and context in Eastern Africa. Although the term “Small Christian Communities”³² is used in many different ways,³³ as a “new

³¹ Laurenti Magesa in a private letter to the author, July, 1983.

³² 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 parishes and dioceses and the official pastoral policy of the Catholic bishops.

³³ Described at length with many examples in Joseph Healey, “Evolving A World Church From the Bottom Up: An Analysis and Interpretation of 3,500 [with new research bringing the total to over 5,000] 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.

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 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.

5. Contextual (covering the social, economic, political and cultural dimensions):

The use of the "See," "Judge and Act" method/process has changed many SCCs from being inwardly looking prayer groups to become outwardly looking groups interested in justice and peace concerns. SCCs' active participation in the annual Kenyan Lenten Campaign is a good example of this shift. Using the Pastoral Spiral to decide on new actions is a process of reaching decisions by communal discernment. One step is social analysis when SCC members reflect on the social, economic, political and cultural dimensions.

God actively participates in this process as seen in the call in *Revelations 2:7*: "Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches." The "churches" are not just the ones of 2,000 years ago. SCCs are part of "the churches," especially the Local Churches, in our contemporary world today.

6. Synodality:

Pope Francis emphasizes the theme of synodality 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."³⁴ 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," "Judge" and "Act" method or process and various forms of pastoral theological reflection and decision-making start with our life experiences.

7. Mission: The second essential part of a SCC is the practical action, service and social

³⁴ Francis, "Homily on 29 June, 2013," *America* Website, retrieved 2 February, 2015, <http://americamagazine.org/content/dispatches/pope-decides-pallium-will-be-given-metropolitan-archbishops-home-dioceses>

and mission outreach. This includes justice and peace actions, different types of evangelization (first or primary evangelization, new evangelization, deeper evangelization) and the mission focus of a SCC. SCCs members try to respond to Pope Francis' call to be missionary disciples. This includes "smelling the sheep" and "reaching out to the margined and those on the peripheries."

The missionary activity of SCCs in the African context includes being prophetic and challenging situations of alienation, corruption, discrimination, division, effects of illiteracy, exclusion, favoritism, inequality, injustice, marginalization, negative ethnicity and tribalism.

III. Development of Small Christian Communities in Africa

The last 10 years has seen the increasing involvement of SCCs in promoting forgiveness, healing, justice, reconciliation and peace in Africa. There is considerable documentation on how some of the 20,000 SCCs were involved in the reconciliation and healing ministry in Rwanda after the 1994 genocide. 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. The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) in Lusaka, Zambia produces guided reflection pamphlets on justice and peace topics for SCCs to generate faith-based action. The various reflection methods in the Lumko Program especially related to social justice are used throughout Africa.

There is an ongoing emphasis on formation and training. Lumko Workshops are regularly held throughout Africa. A workshop on "The Role of SCCs in Civic Education in DRC" took place in Congo in Kinshasa in 2008. The annual Kenya Lenten Campaign trains SCC Leaders to use the inductive "see," "judge" and "act" process of the Pastoral Spiral and to facilitate "Training of Trainers" (TOT) Workshops on justice and peace in parishes and SCCs. Hopefully, the Biblical Center for Africa and Madagascar, commonly known as BICAM, that is located at the SECAM Secretariat in Accra, Ghana can promote more training programs on *Bible* reflection.

Our research shows that a statistical and analytical evaluation of SCCs in Africa 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. Presently there are 180,000 SCCs in the nine AMECEA countries. Tanzania has 60,000 SCCs. Kenya has over 45,000 SCCs. They are pastorally oriented and mainly parish-based. Some dioceses in Nigeria have active SCCs. In other dioceses they are non-existent. SCCs seem to regularly rise and fall. SCCs started in Lagos, Nigeria Archdiocese of Lagos in 1977. However, by late 1980s the SCCs nosedived. In 1992 SCCs became alive again. Now there are SCCs in 60 parishes in the archdiocese.

SCCs are now a pastoral priority of the Catholic Church in Ghana. 2006 statistics indicated that Kinshasa Archdiocese had 1,800 CEVBs in the city with many more in the surrounding rural areas. There are many SCCs in Southern Africa especially South Africa and Zimbabwe. IMBISA (Inter-Regional Meeting of the Bishops of Southern Africa) conferences

and workshops are an important catalyst. The small communities of Sant'Egidio in Mozambique provide another model of SCCs.

A recent development is the Network Small Christian Communities Africa (NSCCA) that sponsored workshops in Accra, 2014, Ouagadougou, 2015, Nairobi, 2016, and Kinshasa, 2017. The network is a resource forum of experts and practitioners who are passionate about the growth and sustainability of Small Christian Communities in Africa. It promotes the internet website www.africansccsnetworking.org. The workshops are organized by *Missio*, Aachen with support from the offices of SECAM and AMECEA.

SCCs in Africa try to read the signs of the times and respond creatively. Two new responses:

1. Workshops for SCCs and Child Protection including safeguarding against child abuse and sexual abuse in the neighborhood. SCCs in Lagos Archdiocese, Nigeria are one of the leaders.
2. Forming SCCs in the newer refugee camps and the newer camps of internally displaced people. Examples are South Sudan and Northern Uganda.

IV. Challenges of Small Christian Communities in Africa

1. Implement a Pope Francis inclusive vision of the Catholic Church. Member of SCCs are challenged to be missionary disciples who reach out to the marginated and those on the peripheries of society. SCCs in Africa have to be on the front line of ministry in these areas: migrants, refugees and internally displaced people; dialogue with Islam; relations with Evangelicals and Pentecostals; and prophetic responses to justice and peace issues.

2. Response to the Digital Age in Africa. In terms of using the internet to promote SCCs in Africa “the future is now.” Today we see the growing importance of networking, the internet and the new media/social media: interactive websites specifically about SCCs in Africa, online journals, online learning sites, video conferencing, webinars, search engines like Google, social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube and Skype, podcasts, video clips, DVDs, special applications (called “apps”), E-readers, email messages, text messages, smartphones and other mobile devices. The social media revolution is changing the way the world – and the Catholic Church in Africa – communicates.

In this digital age we can dramatically expand our knowledge and understanding on three levels. First, the internet and the new media/social media can help in the formation and training of SCC leaders/animators/facilitators/coordinators in Africa. Second, the internet and the new media/social media can help members of SCCs in Africa to share their experience with the rest of the world. Through 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 new media/social media can help people around the world learn about SCCs in Africa.

A concrete example is the [Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website \(www.smallchristiancommunities.org\)](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org) that shares SCCs contacts, information, events, materials and news for each of the six continents. The Africa Continent Section includes a lot of continent-wide material and specific national material from Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Other features on the website are: Archives, Book Reviews, Calendar of Events, Ebooks, Links to other SCCs Websites, Photo Gallery, Resources, SCC Polls, SCCs Stories Database, Search Engine, Videos, Vision and What's New.

3. Continue to form and develop Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs). In many countries of Africa, over 60% of the population is under 25. The Catholic Church is challenged to prioritize two major types of YSCCs:

- a. Parish-based Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs). Includes online YSCCs using What'sApp, Facebook, etc.
- b. School-based/campus-based/institution-based/center-based Youth Small Christian Communities (YSCCs). Includes online YSCCs using What'sApp, Facebook, etc.

This includes active use of Youth Small Christian Communities websites and social media.

4. Many African SCCs try to read the contemporary signs of the times in Africa and respond to today's reality. A key challenge is how to respond to the question "What are the different human problems in Africa that we should reflect on in our SCC meetings in the light of the Gospel?" based on No. 89 of St. John Paul II's Apostolic Exhortation *The Church in Africa*.

Cardinal Polycarp Pengo, the Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, and the former President of SECAM, calls SCCs "a special or privileged instrument of evangelization." Mageza emphasizes: "For the future of Christian mission, specifically in Africa, we can say without hesitation that the development of small faith communities is an indispensable requirement." Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel, the Archbishop of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and present Chairman of AMECEA, describes Africa as a continent with "a great future and a great responsibility, not only for Africans but to the whole world... There is still a need of re-evangelization to make the Gospel planted in the various cultures, to educate the youth in their faith, to prepare Christian Leadership on the level of Small Christian Communities, parishes, deaneries, dioceses, and on the national level."³⁵

Nigerian priest theologian Emmanuel Orobator, SJ describes the future development of SCCs in Africa as follows:

³⁵ Berhaneyesus Souraphiel in "Church's Presence at the African Union among Priorities of Ethiopia's Cardinal-Designate." CANAA Website, 8 January, 2015, retrieved 9 January, 2015, <http://www.canaafrica.org/index.php/home/16-latestnews/148-church-presence-at-the-african-union-among-priorities-of-ethiopias-cardinal-designate>

The significant factors of the future development of SCCs include the level and nature of interest from ecclesiastical leadership, the commitment to the formation and empowerment of the lay faithful and the relative strength of negative socio-economic and cultural factors. Along with the need for ongoing critical reflection on the present organization and practices of SCCs, much still needs to be done to develop the theology of Small Christian Communities as church in the neighborhood. This theology ought to facilitate the expansion of the missionary focus of SCCs to include attention to socio-political, ecological and economic conditions of their context. In this vein, SCCs in Africa would have much to learn from the history and praxis of the Latin American model,³⁶ while, at the same time, developing a distinctively African model of Small Christian Communities as a new way of becoming church.³⁷

5. What are the challenges for African theologians, researchers and scholars in relation to SCCs. 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. We need an African Avery Dulles, that is, an African theologian of the new generation, to develop theologically “Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today.”

St. John Paul II’s 1995 Apostolic Exhortation *The Church in Africa* Number 63, under “The Church as God’s Family” states: “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.” Connected to the Church as Family are community-related African metaphors and images on African ecclesiology such as the “Church as the Extended Family of God,” the “Church as the Clan of Jesus Christ” and the “Church as the Universal Family in Christ.”

The content of African Christian Contextual Theology today is two-fold:

1. Rooted in personal experience.
2. Based on grassroots research and analysis.

Another challenge is the process or method of African Christian Contextual Theology. Today there is an emphasis on a new and distinct African Theological Process or Method that is

³⁶ See Fritz Lobinger. “What SCCs and CEBs Can Learn from Each Other,” *East Asian Pastoral Review* 2013/3 (2013): 287-297.

³⁷ Emmanuel 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): 125.

called by a variety of names: “African Conversation Theology;” “African Palaver Theology;” “African Theology as Conversation;” “African Dialog Theology,” “African Christian Palaver Theology;” and “African Christian Conversation Theology.” Or just “Conversational Theology”/ “Palaver 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.

Fitting into the SCCs Model of Church this is African Theology as Conversation, Active Dialog, Intensive Listening and Learning from Each Other (described as “listening in conversation”) and Consensus. 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 and story-telling related to African Narrative Ecclesiology.

American priest theologian 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, give 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.³⁸

SCCs are not a movement in the Catholic Church, but the church on the move. SCCs can play a major role in the New Evangelization. Already as a new way of being/becoming church and a new model of church (closely related to the Church as Family and the Communion of Communities Models of Church) African SCCs are influencing the World Church. SCCs in Africa will continue to develop in the spirit of the Spanish proverb popular around the world: *We create the path by walking.*

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³⁸ Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985: 16. This book has 10 references to SCCs.

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Rev. Joseph G. Healey, MM
Maryknoll Society
P.O. Box 43058
00100 Nairobi, Kenya
0723-362-993 (Safaricom, Kenya)
973-216-4997 (AT&T, USA)
Email: JGHealey@aol.com
Skype: joseph-healey

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