

29 Criteria to Evaluate a Typical Small Christian Community (SCC) in Eastern Africa

Our SCCs Research Team has established 29 criteria for evaluating a typical neighborhood, parish-based Small Christian Community (SCC) in an urban, urban-rural, rural-urban or rural area in Eastern Africa or a specialized SCC. 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, recent papal documents, practical pastoral decisions based on experience during this 1973-2015 period, and an evolving vision, theology, and praxis of SCCs. **NOTE:** 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 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). Somalia (1995) and Djibouti (2002) are Affiliate Members.

1. The SCC is small -- usually not more than 15 or 25 regularly attending adults (with a varying number of children).
2. The SCC usually meets every week.¹ Some SCCs meet every two weeks.
3. The SCC meets during the week outside of the Sunday Eucharist/"Sunday Service without a Priest."
4. The SCC meets in the home of one of its members usually on a rotation basis.
5. The catechist is not the leader. A variety of leaders/ministers are chosen from within the SCC. They are animators, not bosses.
6. The SCC chooses a patron/patroness saint and is called by his or her name. This gives a specific Christian identity to the SCC beyond its geographical place name. The specific saint chosen serves as a model for the SCC members' lives and work. For example a SCC may choose one of the apostles to indicate its apostolic/pastoral focus or one of the Ugandan Martyrs to show its African identity or a youthful saint if it is mainly composed of young people. The SCC celebrates the annual Feast Day of its patron/patroness saint.
7. The SCC is the felt need of its members on the local level without depending on the priest or pastoral agent/worker.
8. The SCC emphasizes friendships, personal relationships, family bonds, solidarity,

¹ This calls for creativity and flexibility. In rural areas during the planting season (rainy season) SCCs members meet less frequently. Equally it is better to organize SCCs workshops during the dry season after the harvest when people have more time.

and Christian belonging --sharing together, working together, and celebrating together (including social activities, meals and entertainment) in the context of African values and customs. It can be a significant support group.² Developing SCCs is a concrete expression of, and realization of, the Church-as-Family Model of Church (First African Synod in 1994 and Second African Synod in 2009).

9. The SCC is an Inculturation/Contextualization Model of Church that tries to evolve from the grassroots up out of the daily life and experiences of the people themselves.
10. The SCC has some kind of *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection/*Bible*—Life Connections on a regular basis. Usually the Gospel of the following Sunday³ is chosen (a lectionary-based faith sharing SCC) with a clear step by step plan. Members try to integrate faith and life, the *Bible* and everyday experience. Sometimes the SCC has Daily Life-*Bible* Connections. 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” and “Act” process of the Pastoral Spiral/Circle/Cycle. This is an experience of faith sharing.
11. Regularly there is Prayer of the Faithful (General Intercessions).
12. Silence after the *Bible* reading to listen to what God is saying/what God wants to tell us.
13. The SCC has pastoral and business meetings on a regular basis.
14. The SCC has some kind of planned practical action, service and pastoral, social and mission outreach. Ideally this is a communal response where the SCC members carry out the practical action as a group. Ideally it is connected to/flows from the Gospel text of the weekly *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection and is closely related to the pastoral priorities and activities of the parish. This service and outreach responds to local challenges and problems such as lax Catholics in the neighborhood, family and marriage difficulties, problems, bereavement,⁴ sick people, needy and poor people,

² Some SCCs have a special community uniform to express their unique identity and solidarity. This is especially true of the SCCs in Zambia. See the example of John Paul I SCC in Lusaka Archdiocese and the SCCs in St. Leopold Parish in Livingstone Diocese.

³ Sometimes the Gospel of the previous Sunday is read. There is a value here since there is no one way to do the weekly *Bible* Sharing/*Bible* Reflection. Some SCCs like to deepen the meaning and application of the previous Sunday’s readings and homily by using them during the following week. A Case Study is when *Luke* 15:1-32 is used (for example, the 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time – Year C): The three parables of “The Lost Sheep,” “The Lost Coin” and “The Prodigal Son” (also called “The Lost Son” and “The Prodigal Father”). These three parables have many rich themes in alphabetical order: celebration, clemency, forgiveness, friendship, mercy, rejoicing, relationship, repentance and sorrow. Many applications to daily life can be found and discussed in a midweek SCC meeting after hearing the readings and homily on the previous Sunday.

⁴ Members of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) follow the bereavement customs of their different ethnic groups in Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya. The younger brother of the

people with HIV/AIDS, street children, internally displaced people (IDPs), refugees, and people with dependency on alcohol, drugs, gambling and other addictions, local tensions over tribalism/negative ethnicity, concern about ecology and the environment and so on.

15. The SCC usually has a treasury (fund) with a regular collection taken during its gatherings. The money is used for the activities of the SCC such as celebrations (meals, entertainment, etc.), bereavement of members and their families and to help needy people.
16. The SCC has self-reliance projects (self-generating activities) and fund-raisers.
17. The SCC members participate in the Eucharistic Liturgy as a community celebration of life (whether the parish/outstation Sunday Eucharistic Celebration or an occasional Eucharistic Celebration in the SCC itself that is called a *Jumuiya* (Swahili for “Community”) Mass. This reflects the “communion of communities” (or “communities of communities”) model of church. There are opportunities for celebrating other sacraments in the small community such as Baptism, Reconciliation, Marriage and Anointing of the Sick.
18. The SCC is responsible for assisting in the Sunday Mass in the parish, subparish or outstation on a rotation basis.⁵ 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. Depending on the specific place and context SCC members can have other responsibilities: Specific SCCs (sometimes with their own SCC choirs) are responsible for the music and the songs. Specific SCCs are responsible for the “Prayer of the Faithful” (“General Intercessions”).⁶ Specific SCCs encourage the youth participate in the small plays or dramas/role plays that take place during mass.
19. The SCC has various pastoral responsibilities, decisions, and activities in the parish especially related to its members’ religious education and preparation for receiving the sacraments.
20. The SCC analyzes justice and peace issues with concrete follow-up on the SCC,

Chairperson of my own St. Kizito SCC in St. Austin’s Parish died. We had special prayers and a collection. But it was the eldest brother (first born) and the head of the family who led the bereavement customs and plans of the Luyia Ethnic Group including transporting the body of the deceased back to their ancestral home in Kakamega.

⁵ In parishes in Malawi this is called the Week of Service and covers all the masses and responsibilities of the week.

⁶ Zambian diocesan priest Father Febian Pikiti reports that in Kasama Archdiocese and other dioceses in Zambia it is common for SCCs to have their own choirs and to be responsible for the music and the songs of the Sunday Masses. SCC Choirs are common in other parts of Eastern Africa such as Shinyanga Diocese, Tanzania. Some SCCs lead the “Prayer of the Faithful” (“General Intercessions”) and even write out the intentions ahead of time. Conversation with Febian Pikiti in Nairobi, Kenya on 14 August, 2012.

parish, deanery and diocesan levels.

21. The SCC has opportunities for Special Study (on the *Bible*, the Creed, the Sacraments, a Catholic Church Document, a Religious Book, a Devotional Book, etc.), Counseling, etc.
22. The SCC has opportunities for Retreats/Spiritual Renewal and Recollection Days/Pilgrimages.
23. There is an annual SCC Day on the parish, subparish or outstation levels. This includes the Eucharist, a meal and sharing SCC activities.
24. The SCC officially participates in the parish structures as a “communion of communities” (or “community of communities” or “network of communities”) model of church. For example, the SCC (or a group of SCCs) has a representative on the Outstation or Subparish or Parish Council/Parish Pastoral Council. Leadership starts from below.
25. There are regular meetings of the SCC leaders to coordinate and animate SCC activities.
26. There are formation and training sessions (workshops and seminars) of the SCC leaders and animators.
27. There is some kind of coordination and networking of the different SCCs on the parish, deanery, and diocesan levels.
28. The pastoral priority of SCCs is an integral part of the Parish and Diocesan Pastoral Plans.
29. The SCC has a missionary spirit with a specific evangelization (first or primary evangelization, new evangelization, re-evangelization and deeper evangelization) and a mission focus.

More information is available on the:

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

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