

Article for *Journal for Peace & Justice Studies*
Volume 20, Number 2 (Fall, 2010), pp. 43-60.

HOW SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES PROMOTE RECONCILIATION, JUSTICE AND PEACE IN EASTERN AFRICA

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Abstract: Today there are over 90,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the eight AMECEA countries in Eastern Africa. Kenya alone has over 35,000 SCCs. Increasingly SCCs are promoting reconciliation, justice and peace, the three main themes of 2009 Second African Synod. This essay treats the following headings: "Tracking the Historical Shifts of SCCs," "SCCs' Increasing Involvement in Justice and Peace Issues," "Case Study of SCC Involvement in the Kenya Lenten Campaigns 2009 and 2010," "Involving Youth in Small Christian Communities," "SCCs Using the Internet Especially Facebook" and "SCCs as Facilitators of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Africa." One major change is the increasing use of a Pastoral Theological Reflection Process such as the "Pastoral Circle" (the well-known "See, Judge and Act" methodology starting from concrete experience) to help SCCs to go deeper. Now more and more SCCs in Africa are reflecting pastorally and theologically on their experiences, often using the tools of social analysis.

Tracking the Historical Shifts of SCCs

Today there are over 90,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the eight AMECEA¹ countries in Eastern Africa.² Kenya alone has over 35,000 SCCs. Increasingly SCCs are promoting reconciliation, justice and peace, the three main themes of the 2009 Second African Synod. Through the activities of SCCs lay people in Eastern Africa especially are becoming more involved in Catholic Social Teaching, pastoral outreach, social action and advocacy as described in this essay.

First, it is important to track some key historical shifts. While the English text of the *Lineamenta* of the Second African Synod published in 2006 used 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) that continues in the *Propositions* of the synod itself. The French text uses "Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes" ("living or basic ecclesial communities").

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.

From the conclusions of the synod itself 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)." SCCs are mentioned seven times in the *Final List of 57 Propositions*. Key is *Proposition 35* on "Small Christian Communities (SCCs)":

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 that have the tendency to impose on Christian nuclear families their syncretistic ways and customs (Second African Synod, 2009, 35).

Small Christian Communities are “a place for concretely living out reconciliation, justice and peace” (*Proposition 37S*). SCC members are active agents of reconciliation, justice and peace, not just subjects (see No. 22 above and *Propositions 36 and 44*).

Our research has been tracking 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 on justice and peace issues. This may be the number one challenge to SCCs in Eastern Africa. Many are still prayer groups and not concerned with the wider social issues. Many SCCs shy away from justice and peace concerns. The challenge of theologians Father John Waliggo from Uganda (who died in 2008) and Father Laurenti Magesa from Tanzania encourages the SCCs in Africa to become more involved in justice and peace and social action.

One major change in Kenya since the post-election violence in January, 2008 is the increasing use of a Pastoral Theological Reflection Process such as the "Pastoral Circle" (also called the “Pastoral Spiral” and the “Pastoral Cycle”) to help SCCs to go deeper. This process uses the well-known "See, Judge and Act" methodology³ starting from concrete experience. Now more and more SCCs in Africa are using various reflection processes and methodologies to reflect pastorally and theologically 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.

Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, a Missionary of Africa, was formerly the Bishop of Lilongwe, Malawi and one of the original architects of the SCC plan in Eastern Africa. He 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 structural and systemic changes in our society such as facing the underlying tribal and ethnic group tensions in Kenya today. Many

statements from Second African Synod documents recommend the regular use of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*.

The AMECEA Delegates who participated in the Second African Synod emphasized the “Centrality of the 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 Delegates, 2009, 5).

Our research shows that in the ongoing growth of SCCs in Eastern Africa priorities have shifted from emphasizing the importance of the steps of Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection and Practical Action to focus more on the training of SCC Leaders including the Training of Trainers (TOT) Process in order to involve other SCC Members. This is part of the priority of ongoing formation for everyone involved in SCCs – bishops, priests, religious and laity. For example, there is the urgent need to train SCCs facilitators in Kenya to use the "See, Judge and Act" methodology starting from concrete experience in their weekly meetings during the annual Kenya Lenten Campaign.

SCCs’ Increasing Involvement in Justice and Peace Issues

In SCCs in Africa there are two starting points for the weekly Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection: a “Deductive” starting point such as the Bible (for example, the Gospel of the following Sunday) or a particular teaching of the Catholic Church) or an “Inductive” starting point using our daily life (especially our critical concrete experiences, incidents, examples and stories). John Paul II’s Apostolic Exhortation *The Church in Africa* in the section on “Living (or Vital) Christian Communities” states that Small Christian Communities should “reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel” (John Paul II, 1995, 89). In my SCC

classes at Hekima College and Tangaza College in Nairobi, Kenya in February, 2010 and in a SCC workshop at St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary in Nairobi, Kenya in April, 2010 we asked the question: “What are the different human problems in Kenya and the rest of Africa that we should reflect on in our SCC meetings in the light of the Bible?” Participants answered with the following list:

Abortion	Insecurity
Alcoholism	Laziness
Atheism	Malaria
Bad/poor governance	Malnutrition
Bad/poor leadership	Natural disasters
Brain drain	Neglecting ecology/environment
Clericalism	Negligence towards elderly people
Corruption	Orphans
Deforestation	Pollution
Degradation of the environment	Poverty
Displacement of people	Premarital sex
Disease	Prostitution
Divorce	Refugees
Drug abuse	Selfishness of leaders
Gap between the rich and poor	Street children
Gender imbalance	Slums in Kibera, Nairobi
Greed of politicians	Substance abuse (especially alcohol and drugs)
HIV/AIDS	Torture
Homosexuality	Tribalism/negative ethnicity
Human trafficking	Unemployment
Hunger	Unequal distribution of resources
Illiteracy	War
Injustice	

The most cited were tribalism/negative ethnicity and corruption. We grouped these 45 problems⁴ in three categories according to the context: 10 problems apply to society in general including the political world; two problems apply to the Catholic Church; and 33 problems apply to both.

In our various classes and workshops we divided into SCCs to reflect on specific problems. Three SCCs chose “Abortion,” three SCCs chose “Bad/Poor Leadership” (in the government and the church), one SCC chose “Alcoholism,” one SCC chose “Divorce” and one SCC chose “Hunger.” Then the SCCs members found corresponding/parallel passages in the *Bible* and briefly discussed possible solutions to the particular problem. For example, the SCC that reflected on “Abortion” chose many Bible passages from the Old and New Testament including: “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Choose life, then,

that you and your descendants may live “(Deuteronomy 3: 19). “I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Then the SCC discussed how Catholics can influence the final wording in the section on “Right to Life” in the *Proposed Constitution of Kenya*.

On Sunday, 7 February 2010 Santiago Rodriguez Serrano (a student in my SCC Course at Hekima College) and I participated in the weekly meeting of the St. Joseph SCC of the Deaf in Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish, Nairobi, Kenya. It was a powerful, moving experience. This is the first SCC of deaf people in Kenya. We looked at justice and equality in the Catholic Church in a new way. The deaf SCC members want to be included as equals and even start other SCCs of deaf people. As one participant said, “A church without disabled people is a disabled church. St Joseph SCC of the Deaf is a way of including our rejected people into the church and creating one family of God.” (Rea, 2010). A related challenge to SCCs is the equality of women. A new vocabulary is emerging such as Gender Justice and Gender Equality.

Case Study of SCC Involvement in the Kenya Lenten Campaigns 2009 and 2010

Recent research⁵ shows that 95% of the SCCs in Kenya are neighborhood groups⁶ connected to parishes (parish-based SCCs are the most common model in Eastern Africa) and 5% are specialized SCCs such as: nurses at Kenyatta Hospital; teachers who live on the compound of the University of Nairobi -- Kenya Science Teachers Campus; Christian Life Communities (CLC); St Joseph SCC of the Deaf in Our Lady of Guadalupe Parish; and “extraterritorial or floating SCCs” composed of Catholics who live outside the geographical boundaries of the parish but want to stay connected so they meet as a SCC before or after the Sunday Mass.

There are other types of specialized SCCs in East Africa such as Catholic professional

peer groups (doctors, lawyers) that have formed SCCs and small groups in the Christian Professionals of Tanzania (CPT). Recently it was proposed to start a SCC of Catholic MPs in Kenya (Members of the Kenya Parliament). This would bridge the gap between the Catholic Church and the government in Kenya.⁷

From 2006 to 2010 in Kenya both these neighborhood SCCs connected to parishes and the specialized SCCs had unique opportunities to promote "Justice, Reconciliation and Peace" especially during the annual Kenya Lenten Campaigns. They were especially involved in the reflection process of the Second African Synod on the ministry of ecology and care of the environment in Africa.

Jesuit priest Peter Henriot, based in Zambia and an advisor to AMECEA at the Second African Synod in Rome, pointed out that the topic of environmental concern was surprisingly absent from the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the Second African Synod on the theme "The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace" that was published in March, 2009. Issues such as climate change (global warming), ecological integrity, life-style adjustments, and industrial pollution by new investors coming to the African Continent (e.g., in the extractives sector) were not treated. Aside from one passing reference to multinational corporations not paying adequate attention to the environment, this topic was not in the forefront of the problems and challenges in Africa.

During the synod preparations in Eastern Africa Henriot identified the specific theme of the "ecological context for reconciliation:" "Increasingly in Africa (and all over our world!) we are recognizing that we humans belong to the community of creation, the wider environment that nourishes and sustains all human life. However, we have not always respected that truth, with the

disastrous ecological consequences that we now face every day and in every place. How can we reconcile with Mother Earth?" (Henriot, 2009, 3).

All this changed at the synod that took place in Rome from 4-25 October, 2009. Ecology and care of the environment emerged as priorities in the short interventions (speeches) of the synod bishops and other delegates and in the small group discussions. *The Message of the Bishops of Africa to the People of God* has these quotations: "Science and technology are equipping humanity with all that it takes to make our planet a beautiful place for us all." "Multinationals have to stop their criminal devastation of the environment in their greedy exploitation of natural resources." "God has blessed Africa with vast natural and human resources." The *Final List of 57 Propositions* of the Second Africa Synod includes *Proposition 22* ("Environmental Protection and Reconciliation with Creation"), *Proposition 29* ("Natural Resources") and *Proposition 30* ("Land and Water").

The Kenya Lenten Campaigns 2009 and 2010 were promoted by the Kenya Episcopal Conference (KEC) Catholic Justice and Peace Commission.⁸ The 2009 booklet in English and Swahili focused on the theme "Justice, Reconciliation and Peace"⁹ to coincide with the Second African Synod itself and covered the five weeks of Lent, 2009. The "See, Judge and Act" process drew on the experience of SCCs on justice and peace-related themes/issues. The proposed action steps directly involved SCCs. A sample question was: "Are you aware of similar families (as described in the story in Week One) in your Small Christian Community?" (page 9).

SCCs throughout Kenya used these themes, scripture readings and questions in their weekly meetings during Lent. Here is a Case Study (summary of my verbatim notes) of one SCC that I participated in:

St. Kizito SCC, Waruku (an informal settlement near Kangemi) in St. Austin's Parish, Nairobi, Kenya on Sunday, 8 March, 2009 from 2 to 4:15 p.m.

Total of 17 participants: 10 women, 7 men. Mixed ethnic groups. We used the reflection process of Week Three of Lent in Swahili on “Kutunza Mazingira” (“Environmental Care”) of the *Kenya Lenten Campaign 2009* on the overall theme “Justice, Peace and Reconciliation.” The booklet, calendar and poster were distributed to SCC members.¹⁰ We read *Ezekiel 36: 23-25* especially verse 25: “I will sprinkle clean water upon you.” Read twice with silence in between. Also read the Gospel of the 3rd Sunday of Lent (*John 2:13-25*). Read the “Dibaji” (“Preface”) of the booklet from Archbishop Peter Kairo, the Chairperson of the Kenya Catholic Justice and Peace Commission. Good group discussion on the meaning of the drawing on page 38: eight examples of harming or destroying the environment and seven examples of helping or caring for the environment.¹¹

In Step Three (“Act”) our SCC encouraged members to get involved in cleaning up the garbage and trash in the Waruku informal sectors. After the 7 a.m. Mass on Sunday, 15 March, 2009 Washington Oduor will lead the first Clean up Team at 10 a.m. and Anastasia Syombua will lead the second Clean up Team at 10:30 a.m.

Evaluation: One and one quarter hours spent on Week Three. The Lenten materials are a great help, but the booklet was demanding for ordinary SCC members. SCCs need to be specifically mentioned in the text; they cannot be assumed or presupposed. The sequence on page 40 of the Swahili text in the booklet (Step Two on “Judge”) was hard to follow and the key Ezekiel quotation was left out.

What happened on the action? The good news is that between 10:15 a.m. and 12 noon on Sunday, 15 March (the beginning of Week Three on “Environmental Care”) 12 members of St. Kizito SCC took turns collecting the trash and then burning it in small fires at the main dump in Waruku. We successfully cleaned up the whole area. Throughout this process the lay Christians of St. Kizito SCC experienced that “we are the Church” and that we can take responsibility as a small community (Healey, 2009, 90-91).

Our SCC class discussions in Hekima College and Tangaza College on Week Four on “Food Security and Empowering Farmers” revealed the valuable use of Social Analysis. The Kenya Lenten Campaign 2009 booklet describes the Kenya Government and the Food and Agricultural Organization’s (FAO) efforts “to strengthen the capacity of farmers, especially the poor, to maximize food production and reduce poverty and hunger” (KEC Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, 2009, 21). But after the post-election crisis in January, 2008 that was deeply connected to tribalism and negative ethnicity, many farmers were displaced from their farmlands.

Recent statistics show that the government of Kenya has been slow to resettle these farmers on their productive farms especially in the Rift Valley that is known as the Bread Basket of Kenya (especially known for its food crops of corn and wheat). So food production is down and there is starvation especially in Northern Kenya. It was recommended that through fasting during the season of Lent SCC members can have practical solidarity with millions of hungry people in Kenya and throughout the world.

The *Kenya Lenten Campaign 2010* booklet on the theme “Towards Healing and Transformation” focused on many issues related to ecology and the environment. Week Three was on “Environmental Care.” The “See” Step began with the story “Changing the Face of the Mountain.” The “Judge” Step provided a situational analysis of the ecological crisis in Kenya especially encroachment on water catchment areas, desertification and deforestation. This was followed by the three readings for the Third Sunday of Lent. In the Gospel of *Luke 13:6-9* Jesus tells the “Parable of the Barren Fig Tree” and challenges us to recognize our interconnectedness with all creation or perish.

The five questions in the “Act” Step were:

1. Reflect on the story “Changing the Face of the Mountain” and identify two concrete issues which remind you of a similar situation in the context of your family, workplace, Small Christian Community or any other community to which you belong and share your reflection with someone else.
2. Organize a gathering of people within your family, workplace or Small Christian Community to discuss one issue from the “Judge” section and plan on how you as a group will tackle it to positively change the face of Kenya.
3. Like the old lady in the story, commit yourself and your Small Christian Community or any other group to plant and care for at least three indigenous trees during this Lenten season.
4. There is a Kenyan saying that goes: *You must treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It was loaned to you by your children.* What does this mean to you and the care of environment?
5. Pick from the Bible as many verses as you can which tell of Jesus’ familiarity with nature and reflect on them throughout this week (KEC Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, 2010, 19).

Each week the booklet included quotations from the relevant *Propositions* of the Second African Synod. For Week Three the specific recommendations included:

1. Promote environmental education and awareness.
2. Persuade their local and national governments to adopt policies and binding legal regulations for the protection of the environment and promote alternative and renewable sources of energy.
3. Encourage everyone to plant trees and treat nature and its resources with respect for the integrity of all creation and the common good of all (KEC Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, 2010, 20).

SCCs throughout Kenya used these themes, scripture readings and questions in their weekly meetings during Lent, 2010. Here is a Case Study (summary of my verbatim notes) of one SCC that I participated in:

St. Kizito SCC, Waruku in St. Austin's Parish, Nairobi, Kenya on Sunday, 28 February, 2010 from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. The previous day a team of four SCC members bought 26 large seedlings of five varieties of indigenous trees in Kenya (some of which have bark, leaves and roots that are used for traditional herbal medicine such as Croton that is an upper storey forest tree). First 12 members planted trees at the Waruku Primary School. Then a larger group planted trees at the Sons of St. Ann Congregation Novitiate. One member planted a smaller seedling in his individual plot. Then we gathered in Joseph Kahara's home for our weekly meeting. Total of 25 participants: 14 women, 9 men, two children. Mixed ethnic groups. We used the reflection process of Week Three of Lent in Swahili on "Utunzaji wa Mazingira" ("Environmental Care") of the *Kenya Lenten Campaign 2010* on the overall theme "Towards Healing and Transformation". The booklet and poster were distributed to SCC members. We read *Luke 13:6-9* with many members mentioning a word or phrase that struck them. Good group discussion on the meaning of the drawing of the old woman planting trees on the side of the mountain on page 16 and the five questions.

We discussed how we SCC members can get involved in changing the face of Waruku itself during this Lenten season. This includes taking care of the seedlings that we planted (including our number one obstacle – keeping the roaming goats away!) and the general cleanliness of the grounds and dumps (Healey, 2010).

Involving Youth in Small Christian Communities

Given the importance of youth in the demographics of both the general population

and the Catholic population in Africa, 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.

Since youth do not normally participate in adult SCCs in Eastern Africa, it is crucial to form specific Youth SCCs. A very good example is St. Stephen Youth Small Christian Community in St. Joseph the Worker Parish, Kangemi, Nairobi. It meets on Sundays for announcements and planning and then choir practice with the other parish choir, and on Thursdays for a variety of activities: Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection; Mass; Adoration of the Blessed Sacrament; sports like football, darts, etc.; discussion on various topics; and music, singing and dancing. This Youth SCC emphasizes social outreach. Members of St. Stephen SCC joined other youth in the parish to bring foodstuffs and other gifts to a camp of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) outside of Nairobi.

One “thinking outside the box” solution is to encourage Kenyan youth to use Sheng in their meetings. Sheng, the short form of Swahili and English, is a common language of interaction among youth especially in Kenyan cities. It is a blend of Swahili, English and other local Kenyan languages such as Gikuyu, Luo, Kamba, etc. This will send a message that the

Catholic Church is interested in youth and their unique world. Using Sheng can also help overcome tribalism and specific ethnic loyalties.

We all know how much young people love to use “text messaging.” Members of SCCs in Kenya can get the Daily Bible readings on their cell phones/mobile phones. You simply SMS the word "READING" to 3141. You get the Saint of the Day and the Daily Old Testament, New Testament and Gospel texts. This is especially helpful for SCC members who want to prepare the gospel of the following Sunday in advance. This and other methods of social networking help to get youth more involved.

SCCs Using the Internet Especially Facebook

To attract more youth and others to SCCs we are challenged to use the New Media and social networking. *Proposition 56* of the Second African Synod states: “In a globalized world, the improved use and greater availability of the various means of social communication (visual, audio, web and print) are indispensable for the promotion of peace, justice and reconciliation in Africa” (Second African Synod, 2009, 56).

We started the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website (<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org>) that includes a map of the world and a drop-down menu with information on SCCs in all six continents. So far the Africa Page describes SCCs on the African Continent as a whole and in the countries of Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, Malawi, South Africa and Tanzania.

Part of our course on "Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today" at both Hekima College and Tangaza College in Nairobi, Kenya in February, March and April, 2009 was a "Practicum." Instead of a regular class one week, the students (seminarians in religious congregations and one religious sister) participated in a gathering/activity of a SCC (or SCCs) in a parish and wrote a short paper on the experience. They used the "See, Judge and Act"

process of the Pastoral Circle. Many students wrote about the SCCs' involvement in the 2009 Kenya Lenten Campaign on the theme "Justice, Reconciliation and Peace" that was also the theme of the 2009 Second African Synod. The best papers were posted on our website. Hillary Michael Awiti, MHM (at that time a seminarian in third year theology and now a priest) wrote about a "Peace-building Seminar for Small Christian Community Leaders in Nairobi, Kenya in March, 2009:"

SEE

On Saturday, 7 March 2009 I attended one of the Peace-building Seminars for the SCC leaders of Christ the King Catholic Parish in Kibera, Nairobi, Kenya. Kibera is a very populous slum located in Nairobi Archdiocese 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 seminar. This was held in the Parish Hall located opposite the church compound. It lasted from 9.40 a.m. to 1.35 p.m. and was conducted in Swahili.

The facilitators comprised a team of three Mill Hill Missionaries seminarians Philip Odhiambo, Patrick Amarnath and Tony Emeka together with the catechist of the parish, Stephen Njoroge. There were 32 participants: 20 women and 12 men representing the larger ethnic groups in Kenya: Kikuyu, Luo, Kamba, Luyia and Kalenjin. Participants came from SCCs in the five outstations of the parish. The seminar went as follows:

1. Recapitulation on the previous seminars inputs.
2. Application of the inputs using two role plays on the causes of instability in Kibera slums and problems facing SCCs in the parish.
3. Sharing using the "See, Judge and Act" methodology in buzz groups.
4. Reporting to the larger group.

One of the priests working in the parish came with a Religious Sister who made a presentation on the forthcoming International Women's Day on 8 March, 2009. This lasted 45 minutes after which there was lunch and departure.

JUDGE

During the recapitulation process, some participants repeated already mentioned subjects thus becoming monotonous. The seminar was well conducted, interactive and many participants volunteered for the role plays. The

buzz groups opened up a forum where everyone had an active participatory role in the seminar by sharing their personal views. Issues that came up included accumulating debts with the small scale business people that leads to frosty relationships and failing to turn up for gatherings. The second role play highlighted the harm of gossip among SCC members, infidelity and weak leadership. During the entire seminar, there was no time given to scripture readings or reflection.

ACT

Decisions and suggestions were made on how to implement what was discussed in the SCCs themselves. People should be honest about the difficulty with paying debts and not to betray trust by hiding. Ask for forgiveness, be responsible, organized, open and reconcile with others. In the second role play infidelity in marriage was emphasized. Leaders of the SCCs were encouraged to gather information and facts and patiently and sensitively listen to members' views. Then address the matter "*kijumuiya*" ("in community"), that is, involve the other leaders of the SCCs. Gossip causes a lot of ill feelings in the group, raises suspicions, anger, distrust and so needs to be handled carefully. There is a need for a proper reconciliation service after any such events (Awiti, 2009, 1-2)

Stephen Gatito Waweru, MXY wrote a practicum paper in our 2010 course at Hekima College on "The Effects of Tribalism in the Small Christian Communities and Its Efforts in Promoting Reconciliation." He describes a case study in Nairobi, Kenya where a woman member of St. Jude SCC is the representative on the Olympic Sub-parish Truth, Justice and Reconciliation Commission. In turn she is the sub-parish'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. Two key insights of the Second African Synod documents are that SCCs members are "agents" of reconciliation and the SCC itself is a "place" of reconciliation.

One of the newest sections on our SCC website is a SCC Poll to encourage participation and interaction. Based on research (surveys, questionnaires, interviews, visits to, and conferences

on, SCCs) we have identified 80 important characteristics or features of SCCs around the world: 39 on the dynamics of SCCs and 41 on the activities of SCCs. The poll uses the statement -- “The best part of my Small Christian Community is...” -- followed by five choices that are taken from these 80 important characteristics or features of SCCs. We change the poll every two months. One choice to vote for in the Eighth Round that covered July-August, 2010 was: “Promotes reconciliation and peacebuilding.”

Some of the characteristics or features of SCCs that have been voted for are:

- Action oriented
- Concern for others
- Justice and peace concerns
- Liberation focus
- People for others
- Practical action and service
- Reaching out to others
- Solidarity with others
- Transformation of society
- Using the SEE, JUDGE and ACT Process (SCC Poll, 2010)

We started a Facebook Page on our Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Nairobi-Kenya/Small-Christian-Communities/279921983315>). It is noteworthy that after China and India, Facebook is the third largest “nation” in the world -- 500 million. Of the first 387 Fans on our SCCs Facebook Page, 79% are in the 18-34 year old age bracket. The majority of Fans are from Kenya followed by United States, South Africa, India and United Kingdom.

Some comments on our Facebook Page are: “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 NEW MEDIA for evangelization especially in Small Christian Communities?" (SCCs Facebook Page, 2010).

SCCs as Facilitators of Reconciliation, Justice and Peace in Africa

The sections on Small Christian Communities in the documents of the Second African Synod break new ground. First, the SCCs themselves are described as "places" for concretely living out reconciliation, justice and peace. Second, SCC members are challenged to be active agents of reconciliation, justice and peace, not just subjects. This is a loud and clear call for SCCs in Africa to continue to be a new way of being church on the local, grassroots level. As this new model of church SCCs can emphasize deeper biblical reflection and more regular use of the Pastoral Circle to engage effectively in the pastoral and social life around them. As facilitators of reconciliation, justice and peace SCCs can be very important in the future of the Catholic Church in Africa.

NOTES

¹ AMECEA is an acronym for "Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern." It is a service organization for the National Episcopal Conferences of the eight countries of Eastern Africa, namely Eritrea (1993), Ethiopia (1979), Kenya (1961), Malawi (1961), Sudan (1973), Tanzania (1961), Uganda (1961) and Zambia (1961). Somalia (1995) and Djibouti (2002) are Affiliate Members.

² The typical Eastern African pastoral model of SCC is a parish-based, small neighbourhood faith sharing group of 15 to 20 people who meet every week in one of their homes. Ideally this

is a lectionary based and family based gathering/meeting. Normally it is a Bible Service that reflects on the Gospel of the following Sunday. Occasionally there is a pastoral/business meeting. SCCs are not just a program or a project, but a way of life. While this paper focuses on Eastern Africa, SCCs are important in many parts of Africa. For example, South Africa has the Lumko Institute's influential program of forming SCC leaders that is known through the world.

³ This process or methodology is an inductive method of analysis pioneered by the Young Christian Workers (YCW), a worldwide movement of and for young people. Based on the format of experiential learning, participants are encouraged to enquire into the situations that affect them on a daily basis and plan and organize specific actions to bring about a positive change. Cardinal Joseph Cardijn, the founder of the YCW movement, formulated the famous expression "See, Judge and Act" in the early 20th century.

⁴ It is presumed that many of these problems apply to "women" and "youth" although the specific words are not included.

⁵ This research clearly indicates that the dominant model in Eastern Africa is pastoral, parish-based SCCs where SCCs are an integral part of the pastoral life, activities and structures of the outstation and parish starting from below, from the grassroots. But in other parts of the world such as Europe (examples are France and Italy) parishes are losing their membership and influence and the new movements are emerging as a different style of participation and involvement in the Catholic Church. Many of these new movements have a small group component. For interesting Case Studies see the "Europe" section in *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*, ed. Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton,

(Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2005 and Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006), 71-95.

The “Latin America” section describes the distinctive Basic Ecclesial Communities (BECs) model of church.

⁶ Especially in rural areas SCCs are composed of members of extended families living in the same geographical location.

⁷ At the AMECEA Plenary Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya 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 *The Conscience of Society*, ed. Rodrigo Mejia (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995), 50.

⁸ The annual Kenyan Lenten Campaign is one of the best known and appreciated activities of the Catholic Church in Kenya. The themes of previous years include 2008 (“With a New Heart and a New Spirit”) and 2007 (“Kenya's Good Governance, My Responsibility”).

⁹ This word order is different from the theme of the Second African Synod that is “Reconciliation, Justice and Peace.” It depends on the specific context and circumstances and the local interpretation. In general I feel that this is a process in which justice comes first and then this leads to reconciliation and finally to a more lasting peace. Peter Henriot presents interesting distinctions in “Justice, Peace, Reconciliation and Forgiveness: Theological and Conceptual Underpinnings and Linkages” in *AMECEA Synod Delegates Workshop: Shaping the Prophetic Voice of the Region* (Nairobi: Privately printed, 2009), 37-49.

¹⁰ These visual materials were very important in the overall campaign. The drawing on the poster highlighted reconciliation and unity and the full year calendar encourages people to live out the campaign throughout the year. Many religious organizations produced creative calendars in 2009 on the theme of “Justice, Reconciliation and Peace.”

¹¹ A SCC member 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.

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