

St. Catherine SCC Members Visit Islamic Community in Nairobi, Kenya

SEE

St. Catherine Small Christian Community (SCC) is in one of the neighborhoods of South C, Nairobi, Kenya. It bears the same name as that of the parish, St. Catherine of Alexandria. On 27 February, 2014 the Small Christian Community visited the Islamic Community at the home of the Imam at 5 p.m. The Mosque of the Muslims is just opposite the Catholic Church. The visit came as a response to the Small Christian Community's earlier proposal to visit their neighbors, the Muslims, and have some kind of sharing together. There were 53 participants from both sides: 33 from the Small Christian Community and 20 from the Islamic Community. Among them were 38 women and 15 men. Prayers were said for:

1. Peace and tranquility in the neighborhood that would spread to the whole country and the world at large;
2. The sick and the needy;
3. Political and religious leaders;
4. Families especially those that are in difficulties;
5. The youth.

These prayers were said by members of both communities. There was also some discussion on two issues:

1. How to foster close collaboration between the two communities.
2. How the two communities can come together and work for peace.

Some snacks were also served.

JUDGE

There was no reading of the *Scripture* or *Quran* as this was not a theological dialog but a practical dialogue of life. There was an active discussion on the issues proposed, but some members could not get the chance to share their views because some spoke for too long. Some of the members presented their personal feelings instead of addressing the issue at hand. Some were a bit too critical. But on the whole the discussion went on very well. The chairperson of the Small Christian Community was committed somewhere else so he could not make it to the gathering. There were very few young people around, and the meeting lasted longer than expected.

ACT

Since this was the first time such a meeting between the two communities was taking place, there was a decision to have this kind of meetings at designated intervals. How to do this was left to the leaders of the communities. The Small Christian Community also spoke of involving the whole church in this so that it becomes a church event. As a first step in their

close collaboration, the leaders were tasked to choose a date and a place – either a prison or hospital – for the two communities to go and offer some help together.

Reflection: Small Christian Communities as a Means of Promoting Justice and Peace in Africa

Small Christian Communities have a vital role to play in the promotion of justice and peace in African society. Modelled on the family, Small Christian Communities can be seen as a way of experiencing the mystery of the church as communion – communion within and without, that is, among the members and in the human community at large. This is because as a communion of families Small Christian Communities in Africa can promote the values of unity and solidarity, warmth in human relationships, acceptance, dialogue and trust.

Peace in the *Bible* is designated as *shalom*. This means more than just the absence of war; in fact it has a more positive meaning: wholeness, completeness, soundness. It means health and well-being, justice and prosperity, harmony with God and with all others. This is a gift from God as Christ showed when in his healing and preaching he freed people from internal and external domination and oppression, and by forgiving and reconciling people and the world with God, and men among themselves. However, peace is also a fruit of human cooperation with God.

Peace and justice are closely related because peace is the fruit of justice. Justice here must be understood not just in the limited juridical sense of giving someone what is due him or her, but as a respect for the equilibrium of every dimension of the human person. This respect will ensure that we treat each person the way he or she is supposed to be treated, and we will take care of the world as real stewards should. But what really binds these two together is love because love brings and restores peace to human hearts and establishes it in our midst, making us seek out the good and well-being of one another.

Small Christian Communities can play vital roles in the promotion of justice and peace in the society, peace understood as the well-being and harmony with God and neighbor, and justice understood as living in right relationship with others. First, Small Christian Communities can promote justice and peace by being places for the learning and nurturing of the values of peace and justice. Justice and peace begins with individuals especially in the way they understand these values. Small Christian Communities can be of great service by instilling these values in their members especially the young ones. This can be done through education of the members, and telling of stories concerning justice and peace during the weekly SCC meetings.

Second, like the family, Small Christian Communities are agents of socialization and as such have an important role in the socialization of their members. The members of the Small Christian Communities must be well socialized to live in harmony and peace with each other and with the larger community. The ability to live in harmony in the society depends to a great extent on how one is brought up in the family. The Small Christian Communities can play a vital role in this since they also act like the natural human family. Since people learn most through examples, the leaders of the Small Christian Communities must be of good repute and sound character so that the young ones can learn from them. For instance, in Small Christian Communities where the leaders and the elders are living in healthy and successful

marriages, the young ones get inspired to also have good marriages. Likewise, when there are leaders who are seen to be peaceful and just, living in harmony with members of the *jumuiya* and the community at large, the young ones will also strive to live in harmony and peace with all people.

Again, Small Christian Communities can help in the promotion of justice and peace by becoming places where people are appreciated for their differences, in personality and roles. This is important because most of the problems facing our societies stem from the fact that people fail to live with the differences of others. But if we are able to see these difference as enriching rather than dividing, then we will be able to live in peace and harmony with one another. In this sense, through the Small Christian Communities can be the means of promoting justice and peace by helping people to live in unity even in their diversity.

An important aspect in justice and peace is dialogue. Dialogue helps people to share their fears and anxieties, joys and hopes, and their thoughts and ideas. It enables people to settle their differences amicably. The Small Christian Communities, like families, can facilitate dialogue because it is open to and offers welcome to all members. If the members are able to dialogue with one another, the peace and harmony that is exhibited in the Small Christian Community will extend to the larger society.

Dialogue also has other dimensions to it. The Small Christian Community, being the church in the neighborhood, is called to share in the Church's mission of dialoguing with members of other Christian denominations and religions. This dialogue may not be on the theological level, but on the level of life and action. Here, since members of Small Christian Community are not the only people living in the neighborhood, they have to share their life – joys and sorrows, their preoccupations and problems, with others in a neighborly spirit. And this spirit can be inculcated in the members during their weekly meetings.

Justice and peace can also be promoted through the dialogue of action. Here the Small Christian Communities can collaborate with members of other religions, notably Muslims, in working for the integral development and liberation of people. They can go for outreach programs to sensitize people on the need for justice and peace; help people who are affected by injustice and fighting; and work for social development. This is exemplified by St. Catherine of Alexandria SC in their collaboration with the Islamic community in South C, Nairobi, Kenya. Their intention is to work together, promoting healthy living in the community and going to the hospital to help the sick. This is significant because most of the fighting in our societies today is religious – one religion against the other, especially Muslims and Christians. In coming to work together the members thus agree to look beyond their religious difference for the sake of peace.

To finish, I must say that as much as human effort is required in the promotion of justice and peace, it must be realized that these are ultimately the gift of God. This means that prayer is indispensable as far as justice and peace is concerned. Through prayer the members of the Small Christian Communities in Africa can be instruments of God's gift of peace and justice which our polarized and war torn world can never give itself.

Mwanajumuiya Amore Gregory Abangiba, OFM Conv
(seminarian from Ghana)
Tangaza University College

Nairobi, Kenya
gabangiba@yahoo.com