

Joseph Healey, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications – CUEA Press Double *Spearhead* Nos. 199-200 (Print Version 2012 and 1st Reprint 2014). 163 pages. The Online Digital Version, regularly revised and updated from the 2012 print version, is available as a free, online Ebook containing 1,158 pages as of 29 July, 2020 on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website:

https://smallchristiancommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Build_new.pdf

1. SCCs in the Historical Perspective of 59 Years (1961 to 2020) in the AMECEA Region¹

When we look through the window of our 1961 to 2011 50-year jubilee period in AMECEA,² and now nine years beyond, surprisingly, Small Christian Communities (SCCs)³ in

¹ A good historical overview and commentary is found in Zambian diocesan priest Febian Pikiti, “Small Christian Communities: A Key Pastoral Priority for the Church in the AMECEA Region.” Mwanza: Printed Paper, 2014.

² 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).

³ Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is an umbrella term used in this book and is the common expression for this new way of being/becoming church in Eastern Africa. Different terms are used in English on the continent of Africa. BCC means “Basic Christian Community” and BEC means “Base [Basic] Ecclesial Community” and is sometimes written “Ecclesial Base [Basic] Community.” Even some writers in French prefer the term SCC because it indicates the “scale” of the communities. A variety of names are used in the USA. I have visited parishes and institutions in the USA where the specific name “Small Christian Communities” is not known or used, that is, it has very little “Name or Brand Recognition.” Yet people would immediately recognize “small groups” or “small prayer groups” or “Small Church Communities” or “Small Faith Communities” or “Small Bible Study Groups.” The challenge is to create successful “branding.” For example, “*jumuiya*” (the short form of Small Christian Communities in Swahili) is immediately known in East Africa.

In Eastern Africa we capitalize the terms “Small Christian Community” (SCC) and “Small Christian Communities” (SCCs) because it is a key pastoral priority in our Catholic parishes and dioceses and the official pastoral policy of the Catholic bishops

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

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

This research was informally updated in 2020 to include over 5,500 entries with many new Names, Titles, Terms, Expressions, Descriptions and Meanings added. This expresses the rich diversity of this new way of being/becoming church.

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

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

Africa fill this entire historical window.⁴ An interesting “Timeline” in the history and development of SCCs emerges.⁵ At its 6th Plenary Assembly from 20 November to 2 December, 1961 the Zaire Episcopal Conference (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo or DRC that is a neighbor to Eastern Africa) approved a pastoral plan to promote “Living Base Ecclesial Communities” (also called “Living Christian Communities”).⁶ Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes de Base (CEVB) is the full French term for SCCs. The bishops opted for these communities to be more important than the well-known mission structures (church buildings, schools, hospitals). These Living Base Ecclesial Communities were said to be the only way to

⁴ An important historical context is how African Christianity has developed in the past two centuries on three parallel tracks: The first group is the Western denominations brought to Africa by the expatriate missionaries: Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, among others. The second group comprises what has been called the African Independent Churches or the African Initiated Churches. The third group are the Pentecostal and Charismatic Christian Churches. They are distinguished by the experience of the Holy Spirit as normative in church life and worship and belief in world evangelization. They maintain a strong sense of Africanness and are independent in their work, but they maximize their network connections with the global evangelical community. The word and importance of “Evangelical” cuts across all three groups. See Harvey Kwiyani, *Sent Forth: African Missionary Work in the West*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014 especially the section “African Missions in History” (pp. 51-80).

⁵ Irish SCCs animator and writer Father James O’Halloran, SDB makes the interesting observation:” I feel it was a pity that our [expatriate] missionaries did not go to Africa with a communitarian model of church in the first instance, because traditionally there was a great sense of family and community there even before we arrived. Indeed their strong sense of family and community is a special gift of the African groups to the rest of the world.” *Living Cells: Vision and Practicalities of Small Christian Communities and Groups*, Dublin: Columba Press, 2010, p. 206. NOTE: In this Ebook the term “missionaries” will always be qualified with a descriptive adjective such as “expatriate missionary” and “African missionary.”

⁶ Actes de la VIe Assemblée Plénière de l’Épiscopat du Congo. Léopoldville 1961 [20 novembre — 2 décembre], Édition: Secrétariat Général de l’Épiscopat du Congo [Congo-Léopoldville 1961] 133).

make the church more "African"⁷ and close to the people.⁸ Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) Scripture Scholar Father André Kabasele Mukenge states that "a firm decision was made to align pastoral care by setting up vibrant Christian Communities."⁹

⁷ In a symposium in Germany in 2013 Democratic Republic of the Congo Sister Josée Ngalula, RSA stated that the Basic Christian Communities were a response to basic African intuitions and a desire to root Christianity in an African reality. She traced the origins of BCCs in Africa to the Congolese (now Democratic Republic of the Congo) Bishops Conference in Africa in 1961 and to the initiatives of Maryknoll missionaries in northwestern Tanzania starting in 1966. "History, Development and Statu Quo of Basic Christian Community (BCC) in Africa" in Moerschbacher, Marco (ed.), Proceedings of the International Symposium on *In the World of Today? The Church on Her Way in Basic Christian Communities*, Tübingen, Germany, 17-20 January, 2012, pp. 1-2, posted on the University of Tübingen Website at <http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/en/faculties/catholic-theology/lehrstuehle/religionspaedagogik/basisgemeinden-symposium/presentationen-der-vortraege.html> Also found on the Academia.edu Website, retrieved 20 August, 2014, https://www.academia.edu/6456909/HISTORY_DEVELOPMENT_AND_STATU_QUO_OF_BASIC_CHRISTIAN

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

⁸The actual launching of SCCs in DRC goes back to the period 1971-1972 when there was a confrontation between President Mobutu Sese Seko and the Catholic Church. Mobutu's "authenticity" campaign suppressed the missionary institutes and associations. To meet the crisis the church established the priority of the creation and organization of SCCs. The pioneering and visionary Cardinal Joseph Malula of Kinshasa Archdiocese, DRC stated: "The Living Ecclesial Communities are slowly becoming the ordinary place of Christian life with the parish as the communion of the Living Ecclesial Communities." This included emphasizing lay ministries and implementing Vatican II's theology of laity, "the People of God." In his characteristic humor, Malula described his initiative as an effort to "bomb the existing parishes to make them explode in small communities." Quoted in Jean-Marc Éla, "Les Communautés de Base dans les Églises Africaines," in J. M. Éla and R. Luneau, *Voici le Temps des Héritiers: Églises d'Afrique et Voies Nouvelles*, Paris: Karthala, 1982, p. 161.

So the very first Small Christian Communities¹⁰ in Africa started in the then Belgian Congo in the late 1950s (then DRC at independence in 1960, then Zaire from 1971 to 1997 and now DRC again) and then officially 1961, the very year that AMECEA started.¹¹

Then came the historic [Second Vatican Council](#) (1962-65).¹² Small Christian Communities developed as a result of putting the communion ecclesiology and teachings of Vatican II into practice.¹³ Small Christian Communities make real the vision of Vatican II that calls on the Church to be (shine forth as) “a people made one with the unity (brought into unity) from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit” (No. 4 of *Lumen Gentium, Dogmatic Constitution of the Church of the Church*).

No. 9 says that we are even saved “not as individuals... but rather to make them into a people.” We are most whom we are when we gather as an assembly for prayer and worship. Living this kind of Christian life reflects our deepest identity, that we are created in the image and likeness of God. This identity manifests itself in our deepest needs for love, happiness, community and family...Meaning of “Assembly.”

⁹ André Kabasele Mukenge, “The Biblical Approach of Basic Ecclesial Communities: Aspects of Their Fundamental Principles” in Krämer, Klaus and Vellguth, Klaus (eds.), *Small Christian Communities: Fresh Stimulus*, p. 3.

¹⁰ We continue to do research on the first recorded use of the name “Small Christian Community/ies” (SCCs) in English and “*Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo ya/za Kikristo*” (JNNK) in Swahili.

¹¹ A good summary is found in the section “From African Dioceses to Small Christian Communities” in John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, Second Edition, 2009, pp. 389-392.

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

¹³ Filipino laywoman Estela P. Padilla, the Pastoral Coordinator of Bukal ng Tipan – CICM, is presently carrying out very interesting research on “BECs in Africa, Latin America and Asia and their Reception of Vatican 2.”

No. 17 refers to the Trinitarian understanding of the church as “the People of God,¹⁴ the Body of the Lord and the Temple of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁵

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.¹⁶ For in their locality these are the new People called by God, in the Holy Spirit and in much fullness...In these communities though frequently small and poor, or living far from one another, Christ is present. By virtue of Him the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church gathers together.

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

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

The spirit and content of the Second Vatican Council mirror what St. John XXIII described as “reading the signs of the times”¹⁷ when he originally called the council. The

¹⁴ Meaning of the “People of God.” Found in the *Old Testament*’s emphasis on the Jewish People as the Chosen People of God (Yahweh). In the *New Testament I Peter*: 2:9-10 says of the newly baptized Christians:

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

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

¹⁵ 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

¹⁶ 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*.”

¹⁷ St. Paul VI describe the importance of being constantly aware of the changes in society in this striking image: “You must continually stand at the window, open to the world. You are obliged to study the facts, the events, the opinions, the current interests and the thought of the surrounding environment.”

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (commonly known by the Latin title *Gaudium et Spes*) emphasized this explicit call: “The church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and of interpreting them in the light of the Gospel” (No. 4).

For African SCCs this means reading the African signs of the times in the light of the Gospel and at the same time interpreting the Gospel in the light of the African signs of the times. This is an approach to doing theology that American theologian Father David Tracy describes as “mutually critical correlation.”¹⁸

In giving enthusiastic support to Base Ecclesial Communities Honduran Cardinal Oscar Rodriguez Maradiaga, SDB,¹⁹ Archbishop of Tegucigalpa, Honduras describes them as “the great fruit of Vatican II.”²⁰ The Kenyan book of prayers and songs, *Tumshangilie Bwana*, has this interesting description: “Small Christian Communities are one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council and an awakening of the church as the ‘Nation of God.’” A good explanation is found in “Vatican II’s Impact on Small Christian Communities,” in Chapter One in *Communities for the Kingdom: A Handbook for Small Christian Community Leaders* by Irish missionary and theologian Father Kieran Flynn, SPS.

Although the term SCCs is not mentioned specifically in the documents of Vatican II, some of the great theologians of the council emphasized them in their writings in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. The French Dominican theologian Father Yves Congar, OP in *Lay People in the Church* wrote that SCCs are “little church cells wherein the mystery is lived directly and with great simplicity... “the church’s machinery, sometimes the very institution, is a barrier obscuring her deep and living mystery, which they can find, or find again, only from below.”²¹

The German Jesuit theologian Father Karl Rahner, SJ in the chapter on “Church from the Roots” in *The Shape of the Church to Come* wrote: “The church in the future will be one built

¹⁸ “Theological Interpretation of the Bible Today” in David Tracy, *A Short History of the Theological Interpretation of the Bible Today*, Fortress Press, 1984.

¹⁹ It is interesting that Rodriguez Maradiaga was appointed to be the coordinator of a group of nine cardinals (Council of Nine) worldwide established by Pope Francis to advise him and to study a plan for revising the *Apostolic Constitution* on the Roman Curia.

²⁰ In August, 2007 the Social Commission of the Brazilian Bishops Conference stated: “We wish to reaffirm decisively and give new impetus to the life and prophetic and sanctifying mission of the CEBs ... They have been one of the great manifestations of the Spirit in the Latin American and Caribbean Church since Vatican II.” “Base Communities ‘Edited Out’,” *Tablet*, 15 September, 2007, p. 34.

²¹ Yves Congar, *Lay People in the Church*, First published in 1953, (London: Geoffrey Chapman Revised Edition, 1985), p. 341.

from below by basic communities as a result of free initiative and association. We should make every effort not to hold up this development, but to promote it and direct it on the right lines.”²²

The founding fathers of AMECEA had a vision of implementing Vatican II’s ecclesiology of communion in Eastern Africa that focused on the communion (*koinonia*) and service (*diakonia*) aspects. Tanzanian Scripture scholar Father Titus Amigu states: “After the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) doors were opened and the Spirit of God brought a new Pentecost with the introduction of Small Christian Communities in Africa.”²³ Tanzanian theologian Father Nicholas Segeja states: AMECEA started laying emphasis “on developing SCCs as a concrete expression of, and realization of, the Church as Family Model of Church which reflects the ecclesiology of communion of Vatican II.”²⁴ In reflecting on the reception of Vatican II in Africa, Nigerian theologian Father Emmanuel Orobator, SJ comments:

AMECEA has developed an admirable profile in the African Church in the area of regional ecclesiastical collaboration. Arguably, the most concrete and best achievement of AMECEA is its pioneering role in developing Small Christian Communities (SCCs) as a new way of being church.²⁵

As a personal witness to visioning the Church as the People of God, American Maryknoll missionary priest Father Michael Snyder, MM states: “Throughout my years in pastoral work in Tanzania, parish leaders were always selected from the Small Christian Communities. SCCs were the core of parish life in the dioceses where we served. Vatican II has been extremely formative in shaping our generation’s pastoral approaches to mission.”²⁶

²² Karl Rahner, *The Shape of the Church to Come* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

²³ Titus Amigu, “Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo Small Christian Communities in Tanzania,” *Bulletin Dei Verbum* 86/87, 2006, http://www.c-b-f.org/documents/Gemeinschaften_e.pdf

²⁴ Nicholas Segeja, “Summary Notes” on *The Development and Ecclesiology of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in AMECEA Countries*, Nairobi: Unpublished Course Notes at CUEA, 2010, p. 4.

²⁵ Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, “After All, Africa is Largely a Non-literate Continent: The Reception of Vatican II in Africa,” *Theological Studies* 74 (2013), p. 299.

²⁶ Michael Snyder in an email message to the author dated 25 June, 2013.

Latin America,²⁷ Africa and Asia (especially the Philippines²⁸) all pioneered the

²⁷ It is generally agreed that this SCC/BCC/BEC/CEB Model of Church started with the CEBs* in Barra do Pirai Diocese, Brazil in 1956. The language was Portuguese. Salesian missionary priest Father Jim O'Halloran states: "Leonardo Boff traces their beginning to the lament of a humble old lady [called the 'Rosa Parks of CEBs'] so her words may be among the most momentous uttered in church history. 'Christmas Eve,' she complained, 'all three Protestant Churches were lit up and full of people...and the Catholic Church closed and dark!...Because we can't get a priest.' The question naturally arose why everything should come to a standstill simply because there was no priest. This led to an initiative by Brazilian Bishop Agnelo Rossi, Bishop of Barra do Pirai Diocese in the Metropolitan of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil to launch a community catechetical/evangelization movement in Barra do Parai out of which small communities [CEBs] eventually emerged." (Jim O'Halloran, *Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Companion*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996. p. 18). See also Leonardo Boff, *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*. Maryknoll, N. Y. Orbis Books, 1986, p. 3.

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

*The terminology is complex:

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

²⁸ Basic Ecclesial Communities started in Mindanao in the Philippines in 1967 and 1968. BECs started with the social justice advocacy ministry of Maryknoll priests in connection with the Federation of Free Farmers (FFF) that is one of the largest organizations of rural workers in the Philippines --a socio-political movement run by peasants and for peasants. Conversation with American Maryknoll Missionary Father Jerry Burr, MM, 6 August, 2013.

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

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

development of a SCC/BCC/BEC/CEB Model of Church. After considerable research and debate, many specialists feel that quite independently of one another these three areas of the Catholic Church in the Global South²⁹ *simultaneously* experienced the extraordinary growth of SCCs.³⁰ Small Christian Communities are a global phenomenon. They have developing on every continent. Scottish minister Ian Fraser has observed that “Small Christian Communities are the result of the spontaneous combustion of the Holy Spirit all over the world.” Thus the emergence of SCCs is basically a development that is indigenous to different continents and countries at the same chronological time. However much of familial relationship they may have, developments on the different continents and countries each display their own point of departure, given the respective socio-cultural and ecclesiastical contexts/situations on each continent and country.

Thus, contrary to some misinformed interpretations, the African experience did not come from Latin America, but developed on its own.³¹ African SCCs developed mainly as a pastoral, parish-based model of church. O’Halloran confirms this by saying:

that characterize an authentic Vatican II Church] was quite automatically forming itself into a Basic Ecclesial Community.

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

²⁹ The nations of Africa, Central and Latin America, and most of Asia are collectively known as the “Global South” and include 157 recognized states in the world. This term is preferred to the terms “developing countries,” “least developed countries,” “emerging countries,” and the “Third World” that are condescending and pejorative and are usually used in a narrow economic sense. Interestingly the first reference I saw to “the Christian Churches in the Global South” in 2003 was not in a religious journal or magazine but in a “secular” literary magazine – *The New Yorker*. Related terms are: “economically developing countries;” “economically emerging countries;” “economically developing South;” and “economically underprivileged countries.” The newer language is: “Global South countries” (geographical rather than economic); and “Southern Hemisphere” (geographical belt across Latin America, Africa and parts of Asia).

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

³⁰ Confirmed in “Spread of SCCs across Continents,” Small Christian Communities in Mumbai Website, retrieved on 23 July, 2014, <http://www.mumbaiscc.in/spreadofscs.php> and “Development of SCCs in Different Regions of the World,” Small Christian Communities in India Website, retrieved on 23 July, 2014, <http://www.sccind.org/home/inner/22>

³¹ Archbishop Jean-Marie Speich, the Apostolic Nuncio in Ghana, has an original interpretation. He says that the reality of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is an African invention and not a South American concept clarifying that the practice of gathering Christian believers in communities started when the first missionaries in Africa initiated contacts with local communities through catechists. “The Small Christian communities are not a South American invention as many believe that it is. Small Christian communities started in Africa 150 years ago with the arrival of the first missionaries and with the contacts of the local African catechists who

During the 1971 [World] Synod of Bishops³² 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.³³

Orobator explains:

Small Christian Communities are present in various forms in different parts of the world, but they gained a distinctive ecclesiological notoriety in Latin America. In this wider context the specificity or uniqueness of SCCs in Africa does not appear obvious. In some instances they have been compared to and confused with the Latin American model of *Comunidades Eclesiales de Base*. The similarities between both models of SCCs are noticeable, but the distinctions are clear. The same can be said of the historical trajectory of the two models. On the evidence of history, they are contemporaries, albeit they developed on opposite ends of the globe. Their emergence is coterminous, such that ‘it would be hard to establish clearly whether one was prior to the other in logic or historical development’ [American theologian Father Roger Haight, SJ].³⁴

German Divine Word missiologist Father Paul Steffen, SVD adds:

were great witnesses” who experienced much suffering, some having suffered martyrdom.”
Catholic News Agency for Africa (CANAA), 27 November, 2014.

³² In the [Roman Catholic Church](#), the Synod of Bishops is an advisory body for the [Pope](#). It is described in the [Code of Canon Law](#) (CIC) as "a group of bishops who have been chosen from different regions of the world and meet together at fixed times to foster closer unity between the Roman Pontiff and bishops, to assist the Roman Pontiff with their counsel in the preservation and growth of faith and morals and in the observance and strengthening of ecclesiastical discipline, and to consider questions pertaining to the activity of the Church in the world" (Canon 342 of the 1983 *Code of Canon Law*). In terms of the official reports and overall documentation of the various synods, it is said that “those who control the process control the content.”

³³ James O’Halloran, *Small Christian Communities: A Pastoral Companion*, p. 23.

³⁴ Agbonkhanmeghe E. Orobator, “Small Christian Communities as a New Way of Becoming Church: Practice, Progress and Prospects,” in Krämer, Klaus and Vellguth, Klaus (eds.), *Small Christian Communities: Fresh Stimulus for a Forward-looking Church*, Volume 2, "Theology of One World" series of Mission Aachen, Quezon City, Philippines: Claretian Publications, 2013, p. 115.

Small Christian Communities were increasingly seen as an African way to contextualize the communio-ecclesiology of Vatican II. The SCCs are in line with the nature of Africans and are often the only way to combat the negative aspects of globalization, which means in practice to build Christian communities which support their members in their concrete or real life situations as extended families. The reality allows us to speak of a process of building Small Christian Communities in Africa which develop according to the traditions and customs of the culture of Africa and that, unlike Latin America, do not originate in a society of socio-political conflicts that often have influenced the movement of the Latin American Basic Ecclesial Communities. The SCC movement also expresses a reawakening of African traditions and a strengthening of the African identity as being authentically African and Christian.³⁵

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

Second, that SCCs are a parallel church along the lines of the independent Christian (especially Evangelical and Pentecostal) sects. As a clear pastoral, parish-based model, the experience of Small Christian Communities in the AMECEA Region is very Catholic and within the ecclesial structures and guidelines. That the SCCs are closely linked to the parish and focus on pastoral priorities avoids the pitfalls of other parts of the world.³⁶

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

No. 1: "The fervor and vitality of the new Christian Communities, in particular, showed us clearly that Africa is opening itself to the Kingdom of God."³⁷

³⁵ Paul Steffen, *Centres of Formation and Evangelizing Ministry: Pastoral Institutes in Oceania and Africa*, Studia Instituti Missiologici Societatis Verbi Divini Nr. 102, Siegburg: Franz Schmitt Verlag, 2014, p. 99.

³⁶ Based on a conversation with Zambian Archbishop Thesphore George, the Archbishop of Lusaka, Zambia in Lusaka on 30 November, 2013.

³⁷ We say that "the Kingdom is God is here, but not yet" meaning that on earth we experience the kingdom partially (such as in the Sacrament of the Eucharist), but in heaven we will experience the fullness of the kingdom. In his doctorate dissertation Tanzanian priest and theologian Father Wilbert Gobbo says: "In the Social Trinitarian Model, SCCs are like a 'foretaste' (prolepsis) of the Kingdom of God."

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

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

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

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

These two strong affirmations were an important "pacemaker" for many African bishops. It is thus not amazing to see some bishops, from 1970 onwards, realize creative pastoral initiatives.³⁸ Paul VI’s challenges pave the way for the Local Church³⁹ in Africa to develop its own local pastoral structures such as SCCs.

Although 1973 and 1976 are considered the official starting points for SCCs in the AMECEA countries, the seeds were sown earlier. Our research on the history of SCCs in Eastern Africa uses the metaphor⁴⁰ of a trickle of water that grows into a small stream that grows into a narrow river that is fed by many tributaries and slowly grows into a mighty river that became an AMECEA SCCs Key Pastoral Priority. The tributaries are identified as articles, booklets, books, bulletins, conversations, conferences, discussions, DVDs, grassroots experiences, interviews, leaflets, sheets, cards, local experiments, meetings, minutes, newsletters, plans, printed handouts,

³⁸ Ngalula in Moerschbacher, *Proceedings of the International Symposium*, p. 2.

³⁹ The terms “Local Church” and “local priests” are used in this Ebook. The terms “Indigenous Church” and “indigenous priests” are frequently used. These terms have a generally positive meaning in Africa although they have a more critical and negative meaning in the West such as “those indigenous churches.”

⁴⁰ This metaphor can be compared to the historical and scientific search for the source of the Nile River that is a major north-flowing river in northeastern Africa and is commonly regarded as the longest river in the world. The Nile River has two major tributaries, the White Nile and Blue Nile. The White Nile is considered to be the headwaters and primary stream of the Nile itself. The Blue Nile, however, is the source of most of the water and silt. The White Nile is longer and rises in the Great Lakes region of central Africa, with the most distant source still undetermined but located in Rwanda – probably a small trickle of water leading into a small stream that finally empties into the very large Lake Victoria.

radio programs, reports, research, seminars, sound-slide shows, speeches, synods, talks, TV programs, videos and workshops coming from the different AMECEA countries.

The very beginning of SCCs in Eastern Africa⁴¹ (and the whole of English-speaking Africa) can be traced back to the joint pastoral and missionary efforts of the American Maryknoll missionaries⁴² in three rural parishes in the Luo-speaking Deanery (Nyarombo,⁴³ Ingri and Kowak Parishes⁴⁴) in North Mara in Musoma Diocese in northwestern Tanzania in 1966. Then these small communities spread to two other Luo-speaking parishes Masonga and Tatwe.

⁴¹ This early history of SCCs in Tanzania was enriched by the author's discussions with Tanzanian bishop and Church Historian Bishop Method Kilaini in Mwanza, Tanzania on 20-23 May, 2014. See Kilaini, Method, "Small Christian Communities: Sharing the Tanzania Pastoral Experience," Mwanza: Printed Paper, 2014. 7 pages. The Swahili version of this paper is *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo za Kikristo (JNNK): Uzoefu wa Kichungaji wa Tanzania*. http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/small_christian.pdf

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

⁴² Based on conversations with many Maryknollers over the years including Fathers Frank Breen, George Cotter, Ed Hayes, Mike Kirwen, Dan Ohmann, John Sivalon, Dave Smith, Don Sybertz; Mike Snyder and Tom Tiscornia; Brothers Kevin Dargan and Francis TenHoop; Sisters Katie Erisman, Janice McLaughlin and Janice Srebalus.

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

⁴³ See Frank Breen, "Nyarombo, Our Lady of Grace Parish," *Maryknoll History in Africa*, Volume Three (Musoma Diocese – 1961 to 2015), Maryknoll, NY: Privately Printed, 2016, pp. 229-237.

⁴⁴ Laurenti Magesa suggested to the author that a complete history of the origin of SCCs in these parishes should be written up as part of this important historical record. During a visit to North Mara on 8 July, 2014 I interviewed Tanzanian layman Francis Anthony Otieno, the retired catechist of Utegi Parish (originally founded in 1960 as an out-station of Kowak Parish that was founded in 1933). Francis was born in 1948. He has a remarkable memory of these historical events. His father Anthony was also a catechist. Francis knew Father Francis Murray, MM who was the Pastor of Kowak Parish in the 1960s and many Maryknollers who served in North Mara.

This new type of evangelization and pastoral activity began with research on the social structures and community values of the African Initiated Churches (AICs)⁴⁵ especially the Legio Maria⁴⁶ (Latin for “Legion of Mary”), a break-away church among the Luo Ethnic Group, carried out by French cultural anthropologist laywoman Marie-France Perrin Jassy in 1966.⁴⁷ She observed that for the Catholic Church to be successful in evangelizing the Luo people it had to enter into and interact with the Luo peoples’ style of basic community life. It was clear that the Catholic priest could not visit everywhere in Luoland to provide the pastoral care and do missionary outreach. Also the priest did not want everything to wait until he came to a local village and local Christian community. So it was important for the local Catholic Luo communities to have their own regular small community identity where they could be more independent and self-sufficient in praying, reading the *Bible* and social activities. The first terms used were *chama* (Swahili for “small group” or “society;” the plural is *vyama*) and “small communities of Christians” (forerunner of SCCs).⁴⁸ This was the SCC Model of Church from below, from the grassroots.

He recalled that during this 1960s period the Maryknoll Sisters met with small neighborhood groups of Luos to pray the rosary and other prayers.

⁴⁵ Also called African Instituted Churches, African Independent Churches and African Indigenous Churches.

⁴⁶ “A Spirit Initiated Church (SIC) or new religious movement initially among the Luo people of western Kenya. By the early 1960s the movement had assembled a good number of catechists, acolytes, and believers in a spiritual return of Jesus Christ. The continuous expansion of this movement coupled with its belief in Simeo Ondetto as the returned Son of God led to theological tension, and eventual break with the lay Catholic movement, the Legion of Mary. This is the only example of an African Independent Church that broke away from the [Roman] Catholic Church. Legio Maria was legally registered in Kenya in 1966 as a church, expanded massively in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, and eventually spread to many countries in Africa, including Uganda, Tanzania, Congo, Zaire (DRC), Rwanda, Ethiopia, Sudan, and Nigeria. Based in entry for Legio Maria on the Wikipedia Website retrieved on 12 July, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legio_Maria

⁴⁷ A five-page typed history of Perrin Jassy’s stay and research in Tanzania is found in Daniel Zwack, *Nyarombo Mission Diary*, 27 March 1967. Joseph Carney documents her research and findings in *The History of the Functional Structure of the Maryknoll Mission in Musoma and Shinyanga, Tanzania*, New York: St John’s University Unpublished Dissertation, 1973.

⁴⁸ See Marie-France Perrin Jassy, *Forming Christian Communities*, Kampala: *Gaba Pastoral Paper* No. 12, 1970 and *Basic Communities in the African Churches*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973. Perrin Jassy’s work is also found in: Marie-France Perrin Jassy, *La Communauté dans les Eglises Africaines*, Bandundu, Kinshasa: Centre D’Etudes Ethologiques, 1970; Marie-France Perrin Jassy, “*Face au changement: Former des communautés de Base,*” *Ceeba* I, vol. 8, 1981; and Marie-France Perrin-Jassy, “*La communauté de base dans les Églises Africaines,*” *Ceeba*, series II, vol. 3, 1970, wherein she specifically discusses Maryknoll.

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

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

Marie-France was invited to do a study within the Luo Deanery, a group of five adjacent parishes, of the various African separatist churches in the area, with special reference to the Legion of Mary. She set about making a statistical survey of all the Pentecostal sects she could contact, which came to twelve. She tabulated and compared their origins, structures, worship, social activities and peculiarities, their impact upon members and outsiders, the types which adhere to such groups, and the staying power of the societies and members.

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

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

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

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

Each group chose six leaders, three men and three women, to whom I read passages from the gospels about the Christian idea of leadership as humble service. They adopted the rite of washing the feet of members as a regular feature of their meetings. The catechists helped but it was all so congenial to their mentality that they easily fell in with it. The groups engaged in activities, such as helping someone whose garden [farm] got behind, cutting grass for a thatched roof, or building a hut for another.⁴⁹

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

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

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

In the late 1960s, beginning in the North Mara section of Musoma Diocese, Maryknollers initiated the community-based ecclesial model that become known as Small Christian Communities. This model has now spread to all countries of Sub-Sahara Africa and is the pillar of the pastoral structure of the Catholic Church, especially in urban areas.⁵⁰

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

The origin of the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) is sometimes wrongly attributed to the Latin American model only and their value solely judged according to their involvement in the fight for social justice. There was also an inspiring model of the small communities of the independent African churches as documented by the East African study of [Marie-France] Perrin-Jassy, commissioned by the Maryknoll missionaries.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Daniel Zwack, *Nyarombo Mission Diary*, Nyarombo, Tanzania: Privately Printed, 27 March, 1967.

⁵⁰ Frank Breen, “Maryknoll in Africa,” *Interchange*, Volume 37, Number 2 (2017), page 10.

⁵¹ John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1994, p. 459. See also Joseph Healey, “Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and the New Way of Being Maryknoll in Africa.” Maryknoll Society of Fathers and Brothers Africa Regional Assembly, Arusha, Tanzania. May, 1999. Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 3 pages. Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers Africa Region Website, retrieved 27 February, 2015, <http://www.maryknollafrica.org/ComHealeyDocs4.htm>

English diocesan priest Father Gerry Proctor points out that this “Catholic experience of SCCs was an African response to an African problem. It was not copying from another continent of a model of Church that might or might not prove pastorally useful here.”⁵²

The Maryknoll missionaries focused on the formation of small natural communities that were neighborhood groups of Luo-speaking people in the rural areas. By 1968 Nyarombo Parish had 28 small communities,⁵³ Ingri Parish had 22 small communities and Kowak Parish had 25 small communities. As many as 80% of the local Catholics participated.⁵⁴ American historian Joseph Carney reports:

The uniqueness of such a group was that it was not another church organization, the Legion of Mary, a sodality, etc. but rather it was the center of the community life based on geographical, material and social units and it was the growing center of the Christian life.⁵⁵

Carney adds:

The hinge point of the success of its group was the quality of the leadership. The focal point of a [small] Christian community was the sense of service of its leaders based on the gospel of Jesus. Perrin-Jassy, the Luo Deanery and head catechists thought it was important that the community leaders not be catechists. Rather the community had to elect at least six men or women as their community leaders... The catechist was on the other hand was to be the teacher and resource person.⁵⁶

Magesa confirms this history from his personal experience:

American Maryknoll Bishop John Rudin, MM [of Musoma Diocese] was in his own way an exceptionally simple, humble, pastorally-minded person who encouraged pastoral initiatives. The idea of building Small Christian Communities (SCCs), which was officially sanctioned and endorsed in 1976 as the church’s “pastoral priority” by all the bishops of the region (the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa, AMECEA), was born and nurtured in the 1960s in the Diocese

⁵² Gerry Proctor, *A Commitment to Neighborhood: Base Ecclesial Communities in Global Perspective*, Liverpool: Unpublished MPhil Dissertation, 2012, p. 70.

⁵³ See Daniel Zwack, *Nyarombo Mission Diary*, January, 1968.

⁵⁴ Some of this explanation is based on a conversation of Michael Kirwen, MM with the author in Nairobi on 30 April, 2014.

⁵⁵ Joseph Carney, *The History of the Functional Structure*, pps. 232-233.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

of Musoma at Nyarombo Parish under Bishop Rudin's leadership and with his blessing. I was privileged to serve in that parish and to witness the roots of the initiative in the years 1974 and 1975.⁵⁷

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

Frank (Ace) Murray was one of the most creative and innovative Maryknollers in East Africa. He was assigned to the then Africa Region in 1948 and worked in Tanzania until he left the region in 1972 and later Maryknoll in 1974. First Frank worked among the Luo in North Mara. He assisted a French sociologist, Marie-France Perrin Jassy, in a study of the Luo African Independent Churches in North Mara and their style of basic community life. Although 1973 and 1976 are considered the official starting points for Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in the AMECEA countries, the very beginning of SCCs can be traced back to Nyarombo Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania in 1966 with this research on the social structures and community values of the Luo Ethnic Group.

Moreover, Small Christian Communities became the model of church in parts of the dioceses where Maryknoll worked several years before this approach to building the church was officially adopted by AMECEA churches. The famous Luo deanery, home to several of our more famous [human] "buffaloes" was instrumental in promoting this ecclesiological thinking and practice.⁵⁸

Jassy's research led to several pastoral innovations. The "Sunday Service Without a Priest" led by the catechist⁵⁹ was a meeting place and sign of unity for the members of these small neighborhood communities. The local leaders composed newly written hymns based on Luo rhythms, some related to community and unity. After the homily in the Sunday Mass the priest would lead a short "Health and Healing Service" for the sick in the community. This responded to the felt needs of the Luo people for more prayers for healing.

American Maryknoll Sister Catherine Erisman, MM adds:

⁵⁷ Laurenti Magesa, "Endless Quest: The Vocation of an African Christian Theologian" in Jesse Mugambi and Evaristi Magoti (ed.), *Endless Quest: The Vocation of an African Christian Theologian*, a *Festschrift* for Professor Laurenti Magesa, Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2014, p. 15.

⁵⁸ *The Buffaloes: A Story Commemorating Maryknoll Society's 50 years in Tanzania, 1946-1996*, Dar es Salaam, privately printed, 1996, 12, 58.

⁵⁹ Catechist is a very important lay ministry in Africa and includes many pastoral roles and responsibilities. In the USA catechist usually refers to a person who teaches religious education.

A priority of the church at this time was building Small Christian Communities, called *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo* or *JNN* in Swahili. Two Maryknoll Fathers, Dan Zwack and Jerry Pavis, had built up these communities in Nyarombo Parish and [Maryknoll] Sisters Barbara Lambert and Barbara Nowack were in ministry there from 1969 to 1971 as integral members of the parish team. The Luo tribe lived in Nyarombo and the Christians had splintered off into many churches. These splinter groups were very popular, as they blended aspects of Christianity with their animist background. The Nyarombo Parish made strong efforts to assimilate church and culture with 28 active Small Christian Community groups in the parish. The sisters helped prepared community leaders, held prayer meetings and helped the catechists prepared liturgies. From the sisters the women learned health care and domestic arts...Sister Barbara Lambert later wrote of her remembrance of Nyarombo: “It seems that Nyarombo was meant to be a Camelot – a dream that happened for a short time – one shining example of how beautiful and happy pastoral work can be.”⁶⁰

Around the same time in the mid-1960s American Maryknoll missionary Father George Cotter, MM was one of the first pioneers in Sukumaland (the Catholic dioceses in Tanzania where the Sukuma Ethnic Group live) to facilitate Small Reflection Groups of the Sukuma people to use proverbs to get a deeper understanding of Scripture. These groups were the forerunners of SCCs. Cotter’s missionary method was to gather the Sukuma Christians in small circles of eight to 10 people. A key was that these Small Reflection Groups started with life (Sukuma proverbs) and then went to the *Bible*. This experience helped the local Sukuma people appreciate more the wisdom of their Sukuma proverbs and the *Bible*. This can be called a “Sukuma Reading of the *Bible*.”⁶¹

During the Seminar Study Year (SSY)⁶² in Tanzania in 1969 coordinated by the Bukumbi Pastoral Institute in the then Mwanza Diocese the concept and praxis of SCCs that

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

⁶¹ Based on the author’s conversation with George Cotter, Maryknoll, New York, USA, 25 June, 2013.

⁶² The driving force behind coordinating the SSY was American Maryknoll missionary Father Francis (“Ace”) Murray, MM, the Secretary of the Pastoral Department of the TEC and the Director of the Bukumbi Pastoral Institute. He was assisted by American Maryknoll Sister Patricia Madden, MM. For an overview of the process, see F. Murray, “1969 -- A Study Year for the Church in Tanzania,” *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 12., No. 1 (January 1970): pp. 71-73 and F. Murray, “No End to SSY,” *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (April 1970), pp. 168-171.

Years later when the implementation of the 1994 First African Synod was going slowly in Tanzania, Archbishop Anthony Mayala of Mwanza Archdiocese, Tanzania told the author, “We need is another Frank Murray to animate us on the local level.” Maryknoll Fathers &

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

At the SSY Dutch Missionary of Africa Father J. Brouwer, MAfr presented the plan of the town parish of Tabora in Tabora Archdiocese that had six wards. Each ward had small groups of Christians that consisted of ten to 12 families. These SCCs met regularly to pray, read the *Bible*, discuss their problems and explore how they could best live their Christian lives.⁶³

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

This contribution by Fr. Zwack contained some of the salient facets of what was later to become Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa; however, their hour had not yet come. This part of his Position Paper was hardly mentioned when the questions for discussion were drawn up in preparation for the National Seminar.⁶⁴

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

These Tanzanian case studies and examples were first documented in articles in the journal *Service* first published by the Bukumbi Pastoral Institute with headquarters in Mwanza and now called TAPRI (Tanzanian Pastoral and Research Institute) that is part of St Augustine University (SAUT) with headquarters in Mwanza. Gradually the names Small Christian

Brothers Africa Region Website, retrieved on 13 June, 2014,
<http://www.maryknollafrica.org/History8.htm>

⁶³ J. Brouwer, "Problems and Possibilities in Towns and Cities of Tanzania," Position Paper No. 10, 1969 National Seminar Study Year, Bukumbi: Printed Paper, 1969.

⁶⁴ Joseph Kelly, "The Coming of Small Christian Communities to Eastern Africa, in "Report on Consultation on Methods of Research to Find Out How the *Bible* is Being Used in Small Christian Communities in Africa," sponsored and organized by BICAM, Nairobi: Privately Printed, 1989.

Communities (SCCs) and in Swahili *Jumuiya Ndogo Ndogo za Kikristo* (JNNK) became commonly used.

In 1969 Small Christian Communities started in St. Charles Lwanga Catholic Church, Regiment Parish in an urban area of Lusaka Archdiocese, Zambia. German Missionary of Africa Father Andreas Edele, MAfr explains the process of starting SCCs in the parish through a three-year visitation of parishioners in their homes beginning in 1968. He adds, “We got valuable hints on how to form BCCs from Europe and South America.⁶⁵” But he was keen to improve on what he had heard by including “every Catholic family... not just a small percentage of the Catholic population.”⁶⁶

Edele writes:

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

Amazingly, other areas within the parish pleaded with us (like St. Paul) to start similar communities in their place. Therefore, we trained leaders to help us in the work of establishing new communities. Within a couple of years, the whole area of Libala, New Chilenje, Chilenje South and practically the whole parish was covered with SCCs. Soon afterwards, they were adopted as pastoral priority in other parishes of Lusaka. Therefore, Regiment Parish can be truly considered as the cradle of the SCCs in Zambia.

I often asked myself, why this pastoral policy was much more effective in town than in rural areas. A possible answer is that as a church, we succeeded to present the SCCs as a “family”. City dwellers miss the natural family.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ One possibility is that some of Paolo Friere’s ideas, methods and processes entered Eastern Africa through books such as Anne Hope, and Sally Timmel, *Training for Transformation: A Handbook for Community Workers*, 3 volumes, published by Mambo Press, in Gweru, Zimbabwe.

⁶⁶ Andrew Edele, MAfr, “Establishing Basic Christian Communities in Lusaka, Zambia,” *Pro Mundi Vita Bulletin* 81 (1980), p. 22.

⁶⁷ “Natural family” is a term used in Africa. It is the fundamental social unit, inscribed in human nature, and centered around the voluntary union of a man and a woman in a lifelong covenant of

Furthermore, the African family consists not only of the living but also the living dead (ancestors). When we introduced “Patron Saints” it gave to the people an additional identification. In town the SCC gives the family security and solidarity which still exists in rural areas especially in times of misfortune like accidents or deaths. During the whole process, I received more of theological insight from the people, than I was able to give them.⁶⁸

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



marriage. "Natural" is not "nuclear," which would limit its scope, nor is it "traditional," which would restrict its use in public discourse.

⁶⁸ Andrew Edele, “The Beginning of Small Christian Communities in Zambia: Some Versions,” in Marc Nsanzurwimo, *Here We Are: 70 Years of Evangelization and Social Concern. Regiment Parish: St. Charles Lwanga Catholic Church (1939-2009)*, Ndola, Mission Press, 2013, pp. 6-7.

In 1970 Small Christian Communities started in Iten Parish in Eldoret Diocese, Kenya. They were called *Kokwet*, the natural local unit meaning “village neighborhood” in the language of the Kalenjin people. The Christian *Kokwet* “met about twice a month in the evening after work with the catechist, read selected passages from the *Bible* and discussed together what it meant to be a Christian. The emphasis was on service.”⁶⁹

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

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

A Christian community has to be a natural community of life such as a neighborhood and not an abstract entity as the parish. The actual parishes should be decentralized and divided into small local communities called to be the visible expression of the Local Church. A type of such communities developed in a few parishes in northern Tanzania shows a way in which they can be formed. The local existing community has the lineage or extended family as its basis; a basis upon which is built the Christian community – the family of God’s children in which Christian ties transcend or replace those of kinship.⁷⁰

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

In the early 1970s Tanzanian Bishop Christopher Mwoleka (who died in 2002), the Bishop of Rulenge Diocese in northwestern Tanzania, began to develop his vision and praxis of small communities based on *Bible* Sharing and practical action. He is considered the main bishop founder⁷¹ of SCCs in Tanzania. Mwoleka visited the *vyama* in the parishes of North Mara in Musoma Diocese and other community experiments.

⁶⁹ Irish Kiltegan priest Fintan McDonald, “Pastoral Experiment in Kalenjin,” *Mirror*, February, 1972, p. 2.

⁷⁰ “The Christian Community – Basis for Liturgical Celebration,” *Liturgy and Life in Rural Africa*, Kampala: Gaba Pastoral Papers No. 20, 1971, pp. 1-2.

⁷¹ Other bishops who are among the founding fathers of SCCs in the AMECEA countries were Bishop Joseph Blomjous, MAfr of Mwanza Diocese, Tanzania (who died in 1992), Bishop

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

Providentially, the Small Christian Communities, if developed on the right lines, will eventually replace the traditional African extended family or the clan. Just as Baptism transforms a natural baby into a child of God, a small Christian community is nothing else but a baptized clan. The clan with all its culture, ethos, relationships and institutions is not destroyed but purified and transformed.⁷²

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

In 1973-1975 Kalilombe held a Mini-Synod in Lilongwe Diocese, Malawi. He was the first bishop in Eastern Africa to start a diocesan pastoral plan of Small Christian Communities on the grassroots level. His “Biography” states:

Vincent McCauley, CSC (the Bishop Fort Portal, Uganda and both the Chairperson of AMECEA (1964-1973) and Secretary General of AMECEA (1973-1979) who died in 1982, Cardinal Maurice Otunga of Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya (who died in 2003), Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana’a Nzeki the archbishop of Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya (who died in 2020), Bishop Colin Davies, MHM of Ngong Diocese, Kenya (who died in 2017) and Archbishop James Odongo, the retired Archbishop Emeritus of Tororo Archdiocese, Uganda and Chairperson of AMECEA from 1973-1979. Bishops of recent years who have been deeply committed to SCCs include Bishop Joseph Mukwaya of Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese, Uganda (who died in 2008), Cardinal Medardo Mazombwe of Lusaka Archdiocese, Zambia (who died in 2013), Bishop Rodrigo Mejia, SJ, the retired bishop of the Soddo Apostolic Vicariate, Ethiopia, Cardinal Polycarp Pengo, the retired Archbishop of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, Bishop Method Kilaini, the Auxiliary Bishop of Bukoba Diocese, Tanzania and Bishop John Oballa of Ngong Diocese, Kenya.

⁷² Christopher Mwoleka in Joseph Healey, *A Fifth Gospel: The Experience of Back Christian Values*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books and London: SCM Press, 1981, p. 109.

In 1973 he wrote his first Pastoral Letter for Lilongwe Diocese entitled *Christ's Church in Lilongwe, Today and Tomorrow*. The letter focused on building a self-reliant church. His intention was to build Lilongwe Diocese into a church that is self-ministering, self-supporting and self-propagating. To materialize this vision Bishop Kalilombe called upon all the laity to be actively involved in the whole life and mission of the church. He thought that this would be possible if there could be small groups in various places where ideas of how to improve and develop the church could be suggested and implemented at a higher level. Such small groups were to be called *Miphakati* in Chewa ("Small Christian Communities"). Consequently a mini-synod was, later on, called where such ideas were to be discussed by the Christians at all levels; diocese, deanery, parish and outstation. The bishop had in mind that if *Miphakati* would be established, discussions would not only be spiritual but also involve the integral life of a human being such as socio-political aspects of life involving human rights, justice and peace, education and health, employment in line with its conditions and public morality.⁷³

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

The AMECEA Catechetical Congress on "Towards Adult Christian Community" in Nairobi, Kenya in April, 1973 was one of the first AMECEA-wide meetings to reflect on SCCs. The results are contained in *Gaba Pastoral Paper* No. 29 (presently called *Spearhead*). German Fidei Donum missionary Father Max Stetter presented a slide show on SCCs in Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese in Uganda. He points out: "The new way of adult learning we discussed in the congress was an important step in seeing the community as subject and no longer just an object of catechetical and pastoral growth."⁷⁴

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

⁷³ "Biography of Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, Missionaries of Africa (MAfr)," Episcopal Conference of Malawi Website, retrieved on 10 December, 2013, http://www.ecmmw.org/news_updates/kalilombe_BIOGRAPHY.html

⁷⁴ Max Stetter in an email message to the author dated 3 August, 2011.

December, 1973.⁷⁵ The AMECEA Bishops were known for being pastoral minded and interested in grassroots evangelization.⁷⁶ So they had a pastoral sense and concrete pastoral priorities as they entered this meeting in 1973 to plan for the future.

This conference stated: “We have to insist on building church life and work on Basic Christian Communities in both rural and urban areas. Church life must be based on the communities in which everyday life and work take place: those basic and manageable social groups whose members can experience real inter-personal relationships and feel a sense of communal belonging,⁷⁷ both in living and working.”⁷⁸ This pastoral policy was in the context of the statement: “We are convinced that in these countries of Eastern Africa it is time for the Church to become truly local, that is, self-ministering, self-propagating and self-supporting.”⁷⁹

⁷⁵ Bishop (later Archbishop) James Odongo was the chairman of AMECEA between 1973 and 1979 when SCCs were established as the key pastoral priority. See Joseph Healey, “A Journey with Archbishop James Odongo: Celebrating Our Living AMECEA History,” *CANA Online Newsletter*, 29 January, 2015, retrieved on 31 January, 2015, <http://www.canaafrica.org/index.php/home/16-latestnews/175ugandan-retired-archbishop-to-celebrate-his-episcopal-golde-jubilee>

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

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

⁷⁶ A concrete example is when the then Bishop Anthony Mayala made a Pastoral Visitation to Iramba Parish in Musoma, Tanzania where I was pastor. He spent five full days celebrating Mass at the main parish center and the four sub-parishes on consecutive days with three days for Confirmations. He met with the Iramba Parish Pastoral Council and participated in one SCC gathering.

⁷⁷ Ugandan Archbishop John Baptist Odama points out that the SCCs pastoral priority and SCCs model of church is founded on African cultural values of community and family. He uses the example of Africans building their houses in a circular or round shape. Then the people sit in a circle inside the house so that everyone can see each other’s faces. Sharing is easier. This promotes community spirit and values. John Baptist Odama, “Talk at the Opening of the SCCs Training the Trainers Workshop For Those Serving in Refugees Ministry,” Lodonga Spiritual Center, Arua, Uganda, 10 August, 2018.

⁷⁸ “Guidelines for the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s,” *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 16, No 1 & 2 (1974), p. 10.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 9-10.

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

Our objective is to develop more Basic Christian Communities. To achieve this in Eastern Africa we have to take into account the existence of many other Christian Churches, other communities, religious organizations. African Independent Churches and [African] traditional religions.⁸⁰

Looking back we see the importance of putting into practice the challenge of Kalilombe. During this 1973 AMECEA Meeting he said that "every bishop,⁸¹ priest, brother, and sister (and as a corollary, every Catholic) should participate in a particular SCC – not as a leader, but as an ordinary member."⁸² This reinforces a key priority that ecclesologically all Catholics (priests,

⁸⁰ Raphael Ndingi Mwana'a Nzeki, "Planning for the Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s," Text of Sound-Slide Show," Nairobi: AMECEA Office, Privately Printed, 16 December, 1973.

⁸¹ It is often said that bishops are too busy, that they have no time to be with the local lay people, but consider this: There are 168 hours in a week (7 x 24). Participating in a one and one-half hour weekly meeting of a SCC as an ordinary member (with no leadership role) is only 0.89% (less than 1%) of the week. This is a unique opportunity for a bishop to visit the homes of African families and share their lives from the inside.

Tanzanian Bishop Method Kilaini described his participation as a simple member of a SCC in St. Peter's Parish in Dar es Salaam Archdiocese, Tanzania: "This makes me feel at home in my home surroundings with my neighbors whom I would have otherwise not known. Through them I feel part of the local community. Each week I attend the meetings and participate in all the tasks." He shocked some Catholics when he joined his SCC members to sweep the church when it was their responsibility. In Rita Ishengoma, *Akamwani: The Challenges of Bible Sharing in Small Christian Communities*, Dar es Salaam: Old East Africa Ltd, 2009, p. 7. After moving to Bukoba Diocese Kilaini is a member of his local SCC that consists of the priests and sisters living on the bishop's compound. He says in an email message dated 12 May, 2014: "I love and believe in Small Christian Communities."

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

⁸² See South Sudanese Bishop Paride Taban's "Holy Trinity Peace Village" in Torit Diocese, South Sudan, a communal Christian experiment dedicated to reconciling local peoples across ethnic and religious lines.

religious and lay people) participate in this new way of being church. Everyone by his or her Baptism is a potential SCC member.⁸³

This is rooted in the theology that SCCs are not optional, but are the basic unit/basic cell/basic building block/basic foundation/pillar/most local expression of the Catholic Church. That is why ideally we should greet *all* people as Small Christian Community members. During a SCCs Workshop in Lilongwe, Malawi in December, 2013 we had a lively discussion in which some priests resisted this idea of belonging to one SCC saying that the priest serves all SCCs and show not show favoritism to one particular SCC. But it was pointed out that pastorally this can work easily. For example, a priest can become an ordinary member of the SCC in his specific neighborhood or geographical area (that is, where he is actually living). He is a member because he is a Christian, not because he is a priest. Then he serves all the SCCs in the parish in his pastoral role as a priest.⁸⁴

Let us remember that the leaders of the SCCs are lay people. This is one reason why SCCs are a new way of being/becoming church, a new model of church.⁸⁵ Priests, brothers, sisters and seminarians are animators and formators, not bosses. An AMECEA Bishop speaking at a World Synod of Bishops in Rome reminded his brother bishops that priests, brothers and sisters are 1% of the Catholic Church while laymen and laywomen are 99%. Tanzanian Bishop Christopher Mwoleka of Rulenge Diocese, Tanzania stated: “In today’s world there is a vocation to Small Christian Communities. The laity are the leaders in responding to this call.”⁸⁶

At the October, 1974 World Synod of Bishops IV Ordinary General Assembly *On Evangelization in the Modern World* Tanzanian Bishop James Sangu of Mbeya Diocese, Tanzania (who died in 1998) was a General Relator. He presented the report on the continent of Africa called “Report on the Experiences of the Church in the Work of Evangelization in Africa” that was compiled from the answers to the questions of the *Lineamenta* (the Latin word for “Outlines” – the first document in the process of a meeting such as a synod) from the African

⁸³ St. Monica Parish in Palatka, Florida, USA has an interesting approach. Parishioners who do not participate in a Small Christian Community are invited to be extended members. Each SCC invites, welcomes, prays for and connects with them without any coercion. Shannon Scruby Henderson, "Small Christian Communities: Big Results," *St. Augustine Catholic*, July-August, 2013, retrieved on 30 July, 2013, <http://faithcatholicdigital.com/publication/?i=165210&pre=1>

⁸⁴ **ADD FROM PRINTED BOOK**

⁸⁵ Another way of understanding this “newness” of the SCCs Pastoral, Ecclesial Model of Church is Brazilian Theologian Father José Marins’ valuable distinction that Basic Ecclesial Communities/Small Christian Communities “are not a Movement in the Catholic Church, but the Church on the Move.” So the SCCs Model of Church is not like the various church movements - the Marian Movement, the Charismatic Movement, the new Ecclesial Movements, etc. It is different as a “New Way of Being Church” from the grassroots, from below.

⁸⁶ Christopher Mwoleka in Robert Pelton, *From Power to Communion: Toward a New Way of Being Church Based on the Latin American Experience*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.

National and Regional Episcopal Conferences. In Sangu's report Section V on "Communication of Experiences of Evangelization" treats the 12 subjects related to evangelization in the second document, the *Instrumentum Laboris* (the Latin word for "Working Document"), but states: "The order of subjects has been changed to state better the priorities and concerns of evangelization in Africa."⁸⁷ After No. 1 ("Interior Life") and ahead of No. 3 ("Liturgical Renewal") and No. 4 ("Young Churches"), No. 2 on "Small Communities" stated:

The Church in Africa strongly emphasizes the creation of small local Christian communities. 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.⁸⁸ Christian communities at this level will be best suited to develop real intense vitality and become effective witnesses in their natural environment. In such authentic communities it will be easier to develop a sense of community whereby the church can exist in Christ's Body, consisting of many parts (clergy, religious, laity) with many charisms, but making one Body in one Spirit.⁸⁹

African bishops present at this 1974 World Synod of Bishops IV Ordinary General Assembly Fourth Ordinary Synod of Bishops, after examining the specifically African problems related to evangelization, published a famous "Declaration of the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar Present at the Fourth Synod of Bishops on Communion and Co-responsibility in the Church." The section on "Living Christian Communities" stated.

In the spirit of ecclesial communion so clearly proclaimed by Vatican II, the Bishops of Africa and Madagascar emphasize the essential and fundamental role of Living Christian Communities: priests, religious and laity united in mind and action with their bishop. It is the clear task of these communities, rooted and integrated as they are in the life of their peoples, to search deeper into the Gospel, to set the priorities of pastoral planning and activity, to take the initiative called for by the mission of the Church, to discern, in a spirit of faith where there can be continuity between culture and Christian life and where cleavage is necessary in all aspects of life that hinder the penetration of the Gospel. Every activity in the process of building up our churches must operate in constant reference to the life of our communities. Starting off from these communities we must bring to our

⁸⁷ James Sangu, "Report on the Experiences of the Church in the Work of Evangelization in Africa," Fourth Synod of Bishops on "On Evangelization in the Modern World," in Raymond Hickey (ed.), *Modern Missionary Documents and Africa*, Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1982, p. 215. Also published in *AMECEA Documentation Service*.

⁸⁸ This sentence is quoted directly from the 1973 AMECEA Plenary Meeting. This priority resulted from Sangu being responsible for the "Africa Continental Report" that was prepared by him and his AMECEA advisors in Dar es Salaam in 1974.

⁸⁹ James Sangu, "Report," p. 217.

Catholic faith, not only those cultural and artistic experiences which are part of our heritage – real even though as yet modest Africanization – but also a theology which enables us to tackle the challenges arising out of our historical background and the ongoing evolution of our society.

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

Discussions about Small Christian Communities are going on nearly everywhere, but since the local situation is so different the conclusions show a wide variety. We want to stress in particular that these communities have to learn to be more outward-looking.⁹⁰

At the end of the synod the seven delegates from the AMECEA countries issued eight *Messages to Eastern Africa*. The *Message to Laity* emphasized the catechists’ role as “animators of small local communities” and that the responsibility of the laity “to coordinate Small Christian Communities at the grassroots lies on the shoulders of lay councilors in cooperation with the clergy.”⁹¹ So already the AMECEA SCC Key Pastoral Priority (officially to be formulated in 1976) was beginning to take shape.

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

In same year Cardinal Emmanuel Nsubuga, Archbishop of Kampala, convoked a Kampala Archdiocesan Synod to deliberate on the Small Christian Communities as an adopted pastoral program in the archdiocese. After the synod, the cardinal said: “The one-week synod that started on 11 August, 1974 and ended on 16 August, 1974 at Ggaba National Seminary was intended in the first place to evaluate what we had proposed in the first five years’ plan, and secondly, to make a new plan in response to new needs. This time we have to build up a strong Christian Community starting from the family.”⁹²

On developments in Tanzania Kilaini reports:

Mwoleka was the first bishop in Tanzania to make the Small Christian Communities the official pastoral priority of his diocese and as the basic means of

⁹⁰ Emmanuel Nsubuga, “Three Archbishops from Africa Elected to Synod of Bishops Council,” *AMECEA Information*, 24 October, 1974, p. 1.

⁹¹ “Messages to Eastern Africa Are Highlight of Synod of Bishops Follow-up,” *AMECEA Information*, 13 November, 1974, p. 1.

⁹² This history is well documented in Ambrose Bwangatto, “A Church Struggling to Answer Her Missionary Vocation,” Kampala: Privately Printed, 2018.

evangelization. In 1974 he could boldly and proudly be able to tell the Tanzanian bishops of his choice. In fact he already made a governing structure with different functions for members of the SCCs. Much of this was copied by other dioceses and finally by the National Directory of Small Christian Communities.⁹³

In June, 1975⁹⁴ the Tanzania Episcopal Conference passed a resolution to promote SCCs throughout the dioceses. In November, 1975 Mwoleka and the Diocesan Directors of the Lay Apostolate implemented this resolution by developing a step-by-step plan for starting SCCs throughout Tanzania. He coined the saying: "There is no blueprint for building SCCs." SCCs grow, develop, evolve in different ways from below. If SCCs are a new way of being church from the local level up, a certain searching, experimentation and dying and rising will continue as the grassroots tries to evolve this new inculturated model of church and the seed of a new model of society. Mwoleka also stated that in his diocese "the entire pastoral work will be carried out by means of Small Christian Communities."^{95 96} Over the years this term "pastoral work" has evolved in a wider and more holistic sense to touch all of life including social development and justice and peace priorities.⁹⁷

⁹³ Method Kilaini, "Small Christian Communities," p. 2.

⁹⁴ Ngalula points out the similar development in French-speaking West Africa:

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

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

⁹⁵ This is documented in *Small Christian Communities in Tanzania*, Sound-slide show of 94 color slides converted into a video, Nairobi: SONOLUX Media, Africa Service, and Maryknoll: VIDCOM, 1978. The description reads: "The life of Christians in a small, rural village in Western Tanzania is a life of sharing in community. The video shows an example of how the pastoral priority of the Catholic bishops of Eastern Africa -- building Small Christian Communities -- is put into practice on the local, grassroots level."

⁹⁶ This priority is emphasized in other parts of Africa. For example, St. Andrew Parish in Rwanda has the motto "Everything in Small Christian Communities." Each SCC has its own structure, organization and program coordinated through the parish. Christians are brought together through the SCCs.

⁹⁷ The life, apostolic activities and pastoral vision of Mwoleka are described in John Joseph Rwechungura, *Mjue Askofu Christopher Mwoleka: Mtume wa Upendo Upeo wa Yesu*, Karagwe, Tanzania: Privately Printed, 2012.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Another challenge is No. 41:

For the Church, the first means of evangelization is the witness of an authentically Christian life, given over to God in a communion that nothing

should destroy and at the same time given to one's neighbor with limitless zeal. As we said recently to a group of lay people, "Modern man listens more willingly to witnesses than to teachers, and if he does listen to teachers, it is because they are witnesses"... It is therefore primarily by her conduct and by her life that the Church will evangelize the world, in other words, by her living witness of fidelity to the Lord Jesus -- the witness of poverty and detachment, of freedom in the face of the powers of this world, in short, the witness of sanctity.

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

These ideas were reinforced by St. John Paul II. In his 1979 Apostolic Exhortation *On Catechesis in Our Time* Section 67 on "In the Parish" refers to "more pertinent and effective small communities" (see also the original stronger worded "Proposition"). In his 1988 Apostolic Exhortation on the *Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful* Section No. 26 on "The Parish" states: "So that all parishes may be truly communities of Christians, local ecclesial authorities ought to foster small, basic or so-called 'living' communities, where the faithful can communicate the Word of God and express it in service and love to one another; these communities are a true expression of ecclesial communion and centers of evangelization, in communion with their pastors."⁹⁸ In St. John Paul II's 1990 Encyclical Letter *The Mission of the Church* Section No. 51 on "Basic Ecclesial Communities" states that BECs are "a force for evangelization...good centers for Christian formation and missionary outreach...a great hope of the church."

The AMECEA Study Conference on "Building Christian Communities" took place in Nairobi, Kenya in July, 1976.⁹⁹ ¹⁰⁰ The key statement was: "Systematic formation of Small

⁹⁸ John Paul II, "On the Vocation and Mission of the Lay Faithful" *Christifideles Laici* (Vatican: The Holy See, December 30, 1988), http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_30121988_christifideles-laici_en.html

⁹⁹ At this meeting in July, 1976 President Jomo Kenyatta made the now famous statement: "The Church is the conscience of society, and today a society needs a conscience. Do not be afraid to speak. If we are wrong and you keep quiet, one day you may have to answer for our mistakes." Quoted in the Kenya Bishops *Pastoral Letter* on "Family and Responsible Parenthood," 27 April, 1979 and in Rodrigo Mejia (ed.), *The Conscience of Society*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995, p. 50. At the AMECEA Study Conference in Nairobi, Kenya in June, 2011 President Mwai Kibaki said in a similar way: "I urge all Church leaders to freely speak out their concerns over issues affecting the lives of our people. As spiritual leaders in our society you shoulder the responsibility of pointing the right way forward, correcting us when we go wrong and ensuring that we remain God fearing men and women." *AMECEA News*, No. 44 (August 2011), p. 6. This section of his speech on 29 June, 2011 is also found in the DVD on *AMECEA Family of God: Celebrating a Golden Jubilee of Evangelization in Solidarity*. Nairobi: Ukweli Video Productions, 2011.

¹⁰⁰ It is interesting to note the similarity in time to Portuguese-speaking Africa. The First National Pastoral Assembly took place in Beira, Mozambique from 8-13 September, 1977 (two

Christian Communities should be the key pastoral priority in the years to come in Eastern Africa.”¹⁰¹ This is the single most important statement made about SCCs.¹⁰² Kalilombe stated that this decision

is a basic commitment, a serious shift in pastoral emphasis. It is deliberately intended to modify deeply our pastoral system, policy, and practice...We need to adopt a new system, where the basic units of the church are those smaller communities where the ordinary life of the people takes place. If we want the church to live and function actually as a community, then we must go down to

years after independence from Portugal) on the theme “The Ministerial Church and the Small Christian Communities.” The importance of ministries/services in SCCs was emphasized. Mozambique diocesan priest Father Bernardo Suate explained:

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

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

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

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

¹⁰¹ AMECEA Study Conference on "Building Christian Communities," “Conclusions,” *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, 18, 5 (October, 1976), p. 250. The precise meaning of “**the key pastoral priority...**” is in the context of planning for the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa in the 1980s. Later it became “**a key pastoral priority ...**” in the context of broader and more inclusive pastoral priorities such as formation and training of personnel, marriage and family, religious education, development and social services and specialized apostolates.

¹⁰² In SCCs Courses and Workshops today one or more classes is devoted to: "The AMECEA Key Pastoral Priority of Building Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa." For example, see: Annotated Syllabus of Two Credit Course “Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today,” Nairobi: Hekima University College and Tangaza University College, 2013.

that smaller level at which people live and interact in their daily lives. It is in these smaller communities that the church can express itself in a meaningful Christian communion. Such a basic community would be the only realistic base for the church's existence and effectiveness. Here is where the church can exist in an authentic communion. The wider dimensions of the church are not one community, but a communion of communities. The parish is a communion of basic communities within the parish area.¹⁰³

Thus Kalilombe emphasized that the setting up of Small Christian Communities formed a “decisive turning point”¹⁰⁴ in the pastoral strategy of Eastern Africa. This renewal of pastoral method and structure was a logical consequence of a whole trend in pastoral thinking, planning and experimentation. This renewal understood profoundly the difference between breaking the Catholic Church *down* into small communities and building the church *up* out of small communities. There is a pastoral power in building up the church *up* out of SCCs.

The meeting went on to affirm the essential ecclesial character and characteristics of Small Christian Communities by stating: “The [Small] Christian Communities we are trying to build are simply the most local incarnations of the One, Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church.”¹⁰⁵

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

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

The fruit of the Study Conference, it was generally agreed, was the clarification of ideas and the deepening of convictions that the building of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa is a practical policy, and in the case of

¹⁰³ Patrick Kalilombe, "An Overall View of Building Christian Communities," 1976 AMECEA Study Conference, pp. 266-67. For a further explanation of this pastoral shift see Patrick Kalilombe, *From Outstation to Small Christian Communities: A Comparison of Two Pastoral Methods in Lilongwe Diocese*, Berkeley: University of California Unpublished Ph. D. Dissertation, 1983. An abridged version appears as *From Outstation to Small Christian Communities*, *Spearhead* Nos. 82-85 (June--October, 1984).

¹⁰⁴ Patrick Kalilombe, *ibid.* p. 266.

¹⁰⁵ Conclusions, *ibid.* p. 250.

primary evangelization, a necessity. The participants pledged themselves to work for the conference's aims and spirit among their associates in their home areas.¹⁰⁶

During this meeting the word "small"¹⁰⁷ was specifically chosen to avoid certain undertones of the word "basic." Ndingi stated that to call our grassroots communities "small" instead of "basic" is another indication that the movement in Africa was growing on its own, quite independent of what was happening along the same lines in other places such as Latin America.¹⁰⁸

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

Blomjous remarked that "the growing awareness of the presence of Christ and of the Spirit in an authentic community" among the bishops was an encouraging sign. Blomjous concurred with the assertion that the AMECEA bishops themselves had made in 1973 concerning the ecclesiological requirement for the growth of a healthy and mature church, that of "basing the life of the church on Small Christian Communities..." He proposed again that SCCs be made into an integral dimension of the vision and structure of the church in the region.¹⁰⁹

During this time some theologians in Eastern Africa especially the staff of the AMECEA Pastoral Institute in Gaba, Kampala in Uganda were articulating how SCCs are the groundwork for the structure of the whole church. In the "Theology and the Church" section of the book *The Community Called Church* the chapter on SCCs is significantly entitled "The Small Christian

¹⁰⁶ Vincent McCauley, "Introduction," 1976 AMECEA Study Conference, *ibid*, p. 249.

¹⁰⁷ Years later Pius Rutechura said: "Why do we say **SMALL** Christian Communities? Because *small* is beautiful, *small* is visible, *small* makes you feel like you belong."

¹⁰⁸ Raphael Ndingi Mwana'a Nzeki, "Basic Communities: the African Experience" in *A New Missionary Era*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982, p. 100. Jay Carney points out: "It should be noted that AMECEA intentionally adopted the term 'Small Christian Communities' in 1976 to distinguish the African movement from its Latin American cousin." J. J. Carney, "The People Bonded Together by Love: Eucharistic Ecclesiology and Small Christian Communities in Africa," *Modern Theology* 30: 2, April, 2014, p. 303. Academia Website, retrieved 10 June, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/8361392/The_People_Bonded_Together_by_Love_Eucharistic_Ecclesiology_and_Small_Christian_Communities_in_Africa

¹⁰⁹ Based on Laurenti Magesa, "The Church in Eastern Africa: Retrospect and Prospect" in, Agatha Radoli (ed.), *How Local is the Local Church? Small Christian Communities and Church in Eastern Africa*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, *Spearhead* 126-128, 1993, p. 6.

Community as Basic Cell of the Church." The book explains "how the policy of building small communities as the most local cells of the church is solidly based on a vision of the church that is both new and old."¹¹⁰ The pastoral institute modified its nine month residence course at Gaba to include the theory and practice of SCCs.

Kalilombe explained further:

The SCC is the smallest cell of the Church through which the Universal Church lives and breathes. It is the incarnation of the Church of the *New Testament* at the most basic level of people's lives. Through the SCCs, the Church, like Christ, becomes incarnated in the life of the people. She is led by the local people, meets and answers local needs and problems, and finds within herself resources needed for her life. This must be our goal if the SCCs in our parishes are to be dynamic, vibrant, self-reliant and self-ministering.¹¹¹

American theologian Maryknoll Father Michael Kirwen, MM stresses the importance of one's theology of church. The SCC only becomes vital and the nucleus if the theology of church operative in the parish sees it as the foundation of the church, the basic building block of the church, the "little church." Otherwise the SCC is just another traditional society, apostolic group or parish organization like the Legion of Mary. I think most pastors still in fact deal with and conceptualize the SCC as a club, even though they might give a verbal acknowledgement of their building block nature.¹¹² Another distinction is that these traditional societies, apostolic groups and parish organizations have their own special charisms in the church while SCCs are part of the very nature of the church.

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

¹¹⁰ *The Community Called Church*. Volume 5 of an Experimental Source-book for Religious Education, *Spearhead* No. 60 (December, 1979), p. ii.

¹¹¹ Patrick Kalilombe, "Biblical Background of Christian Communities," *AFER*, 1976, p. 12.

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

¹¹² Michael Kirwen in an interview with the author in Nairobi in September, 1983.

the top down, for example, the *International Constitution* of the Legion of Mary that is applied everywhere.

O'Halloran adds:

There is a helpful analogy regarding the small community possessing all the characteristics of the universal church. In a loaf of bread we find a variety of ingredients: flour, salt, water, yeast. Now if we break off a tiny piece, we find the same ingredients in the piece as in the entire loaf. Just so the Small Christian Community has all the ingredients – characteristics – of the universal church.¹¹³

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

The hardest obstacle to overcome concerned the nature of BECs. Repeatedly it had to be said that it is not just another movement like the Cursillo or the Charismatic. Nor was it just another movement like the Knights of Columbus or the Catholic Women's League and hence in competition with these more established bodies. It had to be clearly shown it *is* church itself, the exemplar of a church of communion at the lowest levels of the church. And because it is such, members of any movement or organization must themselves belong to BECs, and help advance them with whatever special contribution to its life that their movement or organization can provide.¹¹⁴

Magesa sums up this theological analysis by saying:

But what is the difference between SCCs and other sociological groupings in the [AMECEA] Region and in the world, even if these latter also espouse joy, justice, reconciliation and peace as their goal? The theological core of SCCs has to do with this question. The issue revolves around what values the different types of communities are based on. This determines their quality and status in the eyes of the church. Mere sociological groupings with this orientation are important and must be encouraged by the church, but they do not hold the same theological implications as SCCs.

SCCs are groupings of a drastically different, much deeper order: they are formed not only to achieve a goal, whatever that may be, but theologically *they are themselves the goal*. This is because they are the church; they constitute the root from which the wider church emerges. Without them the broader, or "catholic," church cannot be realized in the manner that Pope Francis describes it in his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*. At least, it cannot endure. Authentic love, joy, peace, justice, and the common good as illustrated in the

¹¹³ James O'Halloran, *Small Christian Communities*, p. **ADD**

¹¹⁴ Claver, *Making*, p. 103.

Gospels grow as a result of *communion*, the theological element that is the essence of SCCs. SCCs are therefore not only “communities” in the usual sense of the word. Each is a communion analogous to a body of Christ that St. Paul elaborates on (1 *Corinthians* 12). Although there are other analogies of church, such as People of God or Family of God, this image of body is still unsurpassable to describe the reality, nature, and even organization of the church.

Any genuine SCC should be the incarnation of the universal church. The characteristics, qualities and functions or ministries of the church Catholic must be incorporated in it at the same time as the church Catholic reflects the characteristics, qualities, and functions found in SCCs. Arising out of the spirit of SCCs, the universal church becomes also a communion, a body with different parts and different functions, but each in harmony with the rest of the others and respectful of them.¹¹⁵

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

¹¹⁵ Laurenti Magesa, “The Joy of Community in Small Christian Communities,” *New People*, No. 149, March-April, 2014, pp. 22, 24.

- a SCC is a communion of families.^{116 117}
- an outstation (also called a chapel, prayer house, outchurch and sub-center) is a communion of SCCs.
- a subparish (also called a Sunday Mass Center) is a communion of outstations.
- a parish is a communion of subparishes.
- a deanery is a communion of parishes.
- a diocese is a communion of deaneries.
- a metropolitan (ecclesiastical province of one archdiocese and suffragan dioceses) is a communion of dioceses.
- a country (for example, the national bishops' conference) is a communion of dioceses and archdioceses.
- A regional bishops' conference (such as AMECEA) is a communion of national bishops' conferences.

¹¹⁶ Below the parish level Vatican documents and Pope Francis himself use the term “family communities” that can be understood in different senses including Small Christian Communities (SCCs).

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

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

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

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

¹¹⁷ “Catholic Women Association (CWA), they all agree, is an organization whose main objective is to empower and give a voice to all Catholic women...While women benefit principally, the whole family benefits eventually. When women are empowered, their husbands get the benefit of partnering with a wife who is aware of her responsibilities and does them with joy. The children also benefit by having responsible mothers who can bring them up well. When such an empowered family gets to the Small Christian Community, the church is powerfully built.” Archdiocese of Nairobi Website, retrieved on 4 September, 2014, <http://www.archdioceseofnairobi.or.ke/index.php?where=articles&category=About%20Main>

- A continental bishops' conference such as SECAM (Symposium of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar) is a communion of regional bishops' conferences.
- the World Church or Global Church is a communion of national and continental bishops' conferences.

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

At the 1977 Synod in Rome on “Catechesis in Our Time” most of the interventions made by the African bishops revolved around the experience of the Small Christian Communities and their importance in catechetical formation of new converts and seasoned Christians.¹¹⁸

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

The Seven Steps were developed by the Lumko Pastoral Institute in South Africa and have spread all over the world. They constitute a kind of “agenda” for Small Christian Communities as they bring Christ into the center and encourage active participation in the mission of the church in the neighborhood.¹¹⁹

Altogether there are eight Gospel sharing methods that can be adapted to the local context and situation. These excellent training manuals have been used throughout the AMECEA Region. Lumko Courses have been conducted in Eastern African countries annually from 1992 to the present.¹²⁰ The facilitators of these courses are Kenyan Loreto Sister Ephigenia Gachiri,

¹¹⁸ The bishops’ interventions appear in the entire issue of “The African Bishops Speak,” *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (February, 1978).

¹¹⁹ Oswald Hirmer, *Our Joy in Being Catholic: Our Catholic Customs and Beliefs*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2007, p. 87.

¹²⁰ See the “2013 Lumko East Africa Workshop Report” at Tabor Hill Spiritual Center, Nyahururu, Kenya from 9 September to 5 October 2013 by Kenyan diocesan priest Joseph Odongo at: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/lumko.pdf>

IBVM based in Nairobi and Ugandan layman Mr. Joseph Wasswa based in Busia Parish, Tororo Archdiocese, Uganda who are both passionate about the “Lumko Way of Being Church.” Wasswa is catechist who coordinates six outstations in his parish following the “Lumko Model of Church.”

Gachiri gives the example of the Italian Consolata priest Father Thomas Babero, IMC who after completing the Lumko Course for seven years animated SCCs in Kahawa West Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese. He said it would take nine years to implement fully the Lumko Way of Being Church.¹²¹

It is disappointing that these training manuals have not been revised and updated with contemporary examples, stories and references to newer church documents such as the two African Synods.¹²² There are serious gaps in the content. Our evaluation indicates that new SCC manuals should be written on (alphabetically): Addiction, Child Safeguarding/Child Protection, Ecology/Environment, Family, Human Trafficking, Marriage, Internet/Social Media and Youth/Adolescence. Now we could add: Synodal Church, the Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic and Online SCCs.

A challenge to dioceses in the AMECEA Region came from Blomfontein Archdiocese in South Africa that went a step further in the pastoral planning and coordination that emphasizes SCCs by establishing this guideline: "If the pastor in a parish with active SCCs is transferred, there is an archdiocesan policy that his successor should also be committed to SCCs."¹²³

¹²¹ Ephigenia Gachiri conversation with the author, Nairobi, Kenya, 5 March, 2015.

¹²² After years of discernment and study “the August 2013 Plenary Assembly of the South African Catholic Bishops’ Conference resolved to ‘park’ [put on hold/suspend/stop] the Lumko Pastoral Institute for about two years. The process has begun to ensure that the operations of the institute cease in December, 2013. However, the conference center will continue to operate. All are encouraged to make use of this facility for retreats, conferences, workshops.” See the Newsletter of the South African Catholic Bishops Conference *eKhanya*, Vol. 4: 6 (September, 2013). This decision has already seen negative effects. One commentator writes: “SCCs are fewer than twenty years ago, but they still exist. There is no longer a central place from where they are promoted and developed since Lumko has stopped working.”

¹²³ One comment heard from lay people in Eastern Africa is, “We lay people are the victims of the next pastor/parish priest who comes along.” A similar comment: “We lay people are held hostage by the priorities of the next pastor.” Practically this means that in the clerical, hierarchical-style of the Catholic Church, a parish can have an effective pastoral plan of active SCCs, but a new pastor can come in and change this overnight. When I asked some Catholic priests in Kenya about this issue, they answered, “We priests are the victims of the next bishop who comes along.”

The AMECEA Plenary Study Conference on “The Implementation of the AMECEA Bishops’ Pastoral Priority of Building Small Christian Communities: An Evaluation”¹²⁴ took place in Zomba, Malawi in 1979.¹²⁵ The then Bishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana’a Nzeki gave a paper on “Implementing AMECEA’s Pastoral Priority.” There were case studies of “Christian Communities in Mbarara Diocese, Uganda” by Ugandan Bishop John Kakubi, “Small Christian Communities in Kigoma Diocese, Tanzania” by Tanzanian Bishop Alphonse Nsabi and “Community Building in an Urban Area in Zambia” by Zambian Bishop Dennis de Jong. The plenary said:

Small Christian Communities are the means by which the church is brought down to the daily life and concerns of the people to where they actually live. In them the church takes on flesh and blood in life-situations of people. In them people are enabled to recognize the mystery of Christ among them.¹²⁶

The meeting emphasized that SCCs are the neighborhood church that is the embodiment of the One, Holy and Catholic and Apostolic Church and are the best way to renew the church. It said: “Structurally, the Small Christian Community is the most local unit of the Church. The family is the domestic church, but of its very nature it has to reach out to other families, and the Small Christian Community is made up of several family groups. Family catechesis is therefore

¹²⁴ Ghanaian Scripture scholar and Missionary of Africa Bishop Richard Baawobr, MAfr points out: “It might be good to establish five year plans with one or two points to implement during a definite period, with tools and formation in that line. The way you [AMECEA] promoted the Small Christian Communities in the 70s shows that when there is focus and a common drive, things move forward.” “AMECEA Golden Jubilee Celebration 2011: Congratulatory Message of the Missionaries of Africa,” *AMECEA 50 Years of Evangelization in Solidarity: 1961 -- 2011*. Nairobi: AMECEA Secretariat, 2011, p.112.

¹²⁵ During a visit to Mombasa Archdiocese in August, 2011 I learned an interesting footnote in SCC history. Kenyan Father Ernest Mutua, one of the founders of SCCs in the archdiocese, explained that when Kenyan Bishop (later Archbishop) Nicodemus Kirima (who died in 2007) was appointed as Bishop of Mombasa in 1978 he was initially against SCCs. He saw them as an offshoot of Protestant sects in Kenya. But then he went to the 1979 AMECEA meeting in Malawi and met and talked with dedicated animators of SCCs such as Mwoleka. Kirima was converted and came back and began to support SCCs starting in his diocese in 1979. This is a good testimony of the learning process that takes place during AMECEA meetings. Ernest Matua in a conversation with the author on 24 August, 2011.

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

¹²⁶ AMECEA, *Conclusions of the Study Conference of the AMECEA Plenary 1979: African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 21, No. 5 (1979), p. 266.

at the heart of the formation of Small Christian Community.”¹²⁷ So the AMECEA Bishops actually went beyond the theology accepted by the Second Vatican Council.

Then the delegates clarified exactly what these SCCs were not:

The Small Christian Communities should not be understood as a fringe group, nor a group for a few elite people,¹²⁸ nor a group formed for a particular purpose, such as a prayer group, a sodality, a Catholic Action group, a development group, a study group, though these are legitimate and valuable: it is precisely the means by which the one church is present in each locality, touching the *whole life* of its members.¹²⁹

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.”¹³⁰

The “Conclusions” of the 1979 Study Conference made many concrete recommendations. Unfortunately there is a big gap between the ideal and the real. So only a careful evaluation can determine if the following recommendations have been implemented:

1. Young people with representation on the Parish Pastoral Council and other bodies.
2. Small Christian Communities need to be more fully integrated into the training programs in seminaries.
3. No Christian Community can be built up unless it has its basis and center in the celebration of the most Holy Eucharist.
4. The ordained priesthood and the general priesthood of the faithful are in collaboration, not competition.¹³¹

There are eight Regional Episcopal Conferences in [SECAM](#) (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar). These three consecutive AMECEA Plenary Meetings (1973, 1976, 1979) clearly show that AMECEA mandated that Small Christian Communities (SCCs) be the key pastoral priority in Eastern Africa. Why? Why AMECEA? Why Eastern Africa?¹³² How did these changes occur?

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

¹²⁸ The leading CEB theologian in Latin America, José Marins, warns against elitism in SCCs, that is, SCCs members feel they are superior and better than the other Catholics in the parish.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 267.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 268-272.

¹³² Concerning West Africa, research shows:

1. Was it the inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Was this a spirit moment? Was this a *kairos* moment?
2. Was it a “critical mass” of SCC pastoral and ecclesial experiences and activities on the local, grassroots level in all five original AMECEA countries starting in the late 1960s?
3. Was it the African cultural values of family, community and unity as a sociological foundation on the local, grassroots level found in the ethnic groups in Eastern Africa?
4. Was it the vision and practice of AMECEA as a regional bishops conference? As a service organization to the five national bishops conferences, it could do planning, experimentation and research on a regional level that a national bishops conference could not do.¹³³
5. Was it the inspiration and vision of four or five charismatic bishops¹³⁴ (and other church leaders) who read the contemporary signs of the times in the Catholic Church and the local culture in Eastern Africa?
6. Was it the assistance of theologians in Eastern Africa who helped the bishops to go deeper in their reflections and theologizing? The SCCs Model of Church

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1. Retired Nigerian Cardinal John Onaiyekan of Abuja Archdiocese points out that the SCC Model of Church has never been a pastoral priority in Nigeria because Nigeria has a strong Small Apostolic Groups Model of Church as seen in the lively, active small groups in the Catholic Charismatic Movement, Legion of Mary and the wide variety of devotional associations and organizations for example, specific associations for men and women such as the Confraternity of Christian Mothers, St. Joseph Community for Men, and St. Theresa Sodality for Girls. Conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 21 August, 2012.
 2. Theology students from Ghana in my SCCs classes in Nairobi from 2010-2019 have emphasized that in Ghana there is more focus on small devotional groups than on SCCs.

¹³³ “The three AMECEA Conferences were a great inspiration to get involved in the experiment of being church in a new way. Whereas bishops conferences usually are more concerned with preserving traditions, this was a time of farsighted and courageous ecclesiology.” Max Stetter, email message to the author, 27 July, 2020.

¹³⁴ It is noteworthy that two creative bishops who helped to design this SCC Model of Church were elected to the AMECEA Board at the 1973 Meeting: Kalilombe as Vice-Chairman and representative of Malawi and Ndingi as representative of Kenya. Bishop Vincent McCauley, CSC was Secretary General of AMECEA (1973-1979).

evolved in the context of communion ecclesiology in the Local Church in Africa.¹³⁵

7. Was it the positive reception of this SCCs Model of Church by the Christian lay faithful in Eastern Africa (affirmation of the *sensus fidelium*).

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

Clearly there was an ongoing growth process as the Eastern African bishops and other church leaders' understanding of SCCs, and commitment to SCCs, developed over this seven year period (1973 – 1979).¹³⁶ Over the period of these three plenary meetings, the bishops and delegates developed a consensus on the importance of SCCs as the key pastoral priority in Eastern Africa including both the new theological foundations and the new pastoral practices. This was a similar process to how the bishops who participated in the Second Vatican Council developed a consensus on key documents over the four sessions. The four year period (1962-65) with theological input, reading, reflection, discussion and discernment in between each session produced deeper and more quality documents and decisions. As many changes occurred both collegiality and synodality were at work guided by the Holy Spirit.

In commenting on the AMECEA process or methodology during this 1973 – 1979 period Laurenti Magesa states: "The assistance of theologians in Eastern Africa (specifically the Gaba Pastoral Institute and Gaba publications) was a critical element."¹³⁷ I had the opportunity to visit the Gaba Pastoral Institute in Kampala, Uganda during this time. I recall joining the staff in the Faculty Sitting Room after supper. Theologians like Brian Hearne and Aylward Shorter would be part of a theological thinktank. They would theologize together in a palaver theology or conversation theology style. Out of these encounters came publications like *The Community Called Church*. Volume 5 of an Experimental Source-book for Religious Education, *Spearhead* No. 60 (December, 1979). The chapter on SCCs is significantly entitled "The Small Christian Community as Basic Cell of the Church."

The focus in the decade of the 1980s was on the implementation of SCCs as the key pastoral priority in the AMECEA Region. The results were uneven. Some dioceses and countries forged ahead. Others lagged behind. The reasons included church-centered reasons such as the

¹³⁵ Laurenti Magesa cleverly adapts a Nigerian proverb to say, *it takes the whole village to raise this new baby called the SCC model of church*.

¹³⁶ Many are concerned that the new and younger bishops in the AMECEA Region today have not gone through this same learning process and so do not have the same convictions and commitment as the earlier generation.

¹³⁷ Laurenti Magesa, email message to the author, 25 July, 2020.

reality that some bishops promoted SCCs, others did not and vast amounts of time, energy and money were devoted to various church events such as papal visits to Eastern Africa, jubilees and anniversary celebrations. Other reasons were political, social and economic such as ongoing civil wars and internal unrest in the region and widespread poverty.

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

We recommend to Episcopal Conferences, assemblies and associations in Africa to do all they can to encourage the emergence of a pastoral plan for SCCs or Small Ecclesial Communities that are able to undertake integral activities of evangelism and development.¹³⁸

The Uganda Episcopal Conference declared SCCs a national policy in 1985.¹³⁹

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

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In 1990 English Bishop James Holmes-Siedle, MAfr (who died in 1995) who spent many years animating SCCs in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda was commissioned to do an evaluation of SCCs in the AMECEA Region that was published as “A Look at 17 Years of SCCs in Eastern Africa.”¹⁴⁰ He recommended the introduction of Mobile SCCs Training Teams¹⁴¹ to facilitate workshops and seminars on SCCs as was being done in Malawi.

The AMECEA Study Conference on “Evangelization with its Central Issues: Inculturation, Small Christian Communities and Priestly, Religious and Christian Formation” in Lusaka, Zambia in 1992 focused on an “Evaluation of AMECEA.” The research findings identified four AMECEA priorities that included “Promotion of SCCs” and recommended in-service training for animators of SCCs. This conference reiterated the SCC pastoral commitment

¹³⁸ *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 26, No. 5 (October, 1984), p. 259.

¹³⁹ Catholic Bishops of Uganda, *Celebrating our Ancestors in the Faith. Kisubi: Marianum Press, 1985, Nos. 23-24.*

¹⁴⁰ James Holmes-Siedle, “A Look at 17 Years of SCCs in Eastern Africa,” *African Ecclesial Review (AFER)*, Vol. 32, No. 6 (December, 1990), pp. 359-362.

¹⁴¹ In conversations over the years with two Secretary Generals of the Uganda Episcopal Conference – Fathers Joseph Obunga and John Kauta – both felt that the best pastoral solution for developing SCCs in Uganda was not setting up an office at the National Catholic Secretariat in Kampala, but to set up Mobile SCCs Training Teams to visit the dioceses, seminaries and pastoral centers.

by stating: "So we repeat that SCCs are not optional¹⁴² in our churches; they are central to the life of faith and the ministry of evangelization."

A major step was the First African Synod¹⁴³ in Rome in April, 1994 on the theme "The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission to the Year 2000" with five main topics: "Proclamation of the Good News of Salvation", "Inculturation", "Dialog", "Justice and Peace" and the "Means of Social Communications." Irish theologian Father Cecil McGarry, SJ (who died in 2009) emphasizes

the growing centrality of Small Christian Communities in the minds of the [synod] fathers and in the documents of the synod. As was seen, they only featured in passing in the Outline [*Lineamenta*]. By the end of the synod they were understood to be essential if the synod is to take root in the Local Churches and thus be effective and produce fruit.¹⁴⁴

Of the 211 interventions during the first two weeks of the First African Synod, there were 29 interventions on SCCs (the fourth highest number after the topics of justice, inculturation and laity). Bishops from the AMECEA countries were in the forefront in making these interventions. Tanzanian Archbishop Anthony Mayala (who died in 2009) of Mwanza Archdiocese, Tanzania said that "Small Christian Communities seem to be the best way for us of being a church in our African countries."¹⁴⁵ Kenyan 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."¹⁴⁶

Regarding the "Ecclesiology of the Church-as-Family" the *Final Message of the Bishops of Africa to the People of God* in Section 28 on "The Church-as-Family and Small Christian Communities" states: "The Church, the Family of God, implies the creation of small communities at the human level, living or basic ecclesial communities... These individual

¹⁴² The English word "option" (or "optional") is easily misunderstood and is often used in a pastoral context as one choice among many, that is, not obligatory or necessary. If used to describe SCCs, the better meaning or expression is "preferential option."

¹⁴³ The full official title is the "First Special Assembly of the Synod of African Bishops."

¹⁴⁴ Cecil McGarry (ed.), *What Happened at the African Synod?*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1995, p. 146.

¹⁴⁵ Anthony Mayala, "Ninth General Congregation," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 18, 1339 (May 4, 1994), p. 10.

¹⁴⁶ Zacchaeus Okoth, "Eighth General Congregation," *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6. Afrika World Website, retrieved on 24 August, 2012, <http://www.afrikaworld.net/synod/okoth.htm>

Churches-as-Families have the task of working to transform society.” This is an inculturated African Ecclesiology.

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

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

Number 89 under "Living (or Vital) Christian Communities:" "Right from the beginning, the Synod Fathers recognized that the Church as Family cannot reach her full potential as Church unless she is divided into communities small enough to foster close human relationships. The Assembly described the characteristics of such communities as follows: primarily they should be places engaged in evangelizing themselves, so that subsequently they can bring the Good News to others; they should moreover be communities which pray and listen to God's Word, encourage the members themselves to take on responsibility, learn to live an ecclesial life, and reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel.¹⁴⁷ Above all, these communities are to be committed to living Christ's love for everybody, a love which transcends the limits of natural solidarity of clans, tribes or other interest groups."

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

The conception of the church as Family of God has its roots deep in Holy Scripture, but it also has anthropological roots in African and Malagasy cultures. This does not push aside the conciliar idea of the church as People of God, but it does emphasize the reality of the family for the African continent as the place where models of ecclesial experience lived out in Africa emerge... This church is lived out at its base as a domestic church, and is given different names: Christian Base Communities, Living Ecclesial Communities, Small Christian Base Communities.¹⁴⁸

COMMENTARY:

English theologian Philip Knights comments:

Certainly the idea of Basic Ecclesial Communities as the foundational unit of Ecclesiology in the Church-as-Family is not promoted... *Ecclesia in Africa* acknowledges SCCs but dilutes somewhat the "Message of the Synod." No. 21. It does not present the SCCs as a "new way of being Church" or give them a

¹⁴⁷ Another wording is: "To look at the reality of life around us in the LIGHT OF CHRIST through the reading of the *Bible*." "SCCs Prayer Card," Queen of Peace Parish South B, Nairobi, Kenya.

¹⁴⁸ François Kabasele Lumbala, "The Church as Family in Africa," *Concilium* 1995/4, p. 93.

prominent place in discussions. ...The Synod has encouraged debate on the meaning of Church as Family. In these, and other areas, the African Church should seize the moment. The ball is now in the court of the people of Africa: theologians and others may help, but the lasting consequences of the synod now must take place amongst the people, and perhaps particularly amongst the Small Christian Communities.¹⁴⁹

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-up¹⁵⁰ and implementation of the recommendations of the First African Synod. This included developing SCCs as a concrete expression of, and realization of, the Church-as-Family Model of Church. This SCC Pastoral Priority was clear in Ndola Diocese, Zambia. The *Ndola Diocesan Guidelines* states: “We share in the universal Church’s mission...This is achieved through the establishment of active and fully involved Small Christian Communities.”

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

The implementation of the new *Constitution of the National Lay Council* in 1998 required that the election of lay leaders in parishes throughout Tanzania start at the level of SCCs and move upwards. This insured that the Parish Council and Parish Pastoral Council¹⁵¹ 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.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Philip Knights, “The African Synod in Rome, 1994: Consequences for Catholicism Consequences for Catholicism,” Talk at the Henry Martyn Seminar on 20 May 1999, retrieved on 11 November, 2015 <http://www.afrikaworld.net/synod/knights.htm>

¹⁵⁰ A more accurate word is “follow-down” (or “follow-thru”) because the natural process is to get the recommendations down (that is, carried out) to the local, grassroots level.

¹⁵¹ Parish Pastoral Council (PPC) is a popular term used to emphasize that the council should have a pastoral focus. See the *1983 Code of Canon Law*, No. 536: “A pastoral council is to be established in each parish, over which the pastor presides and in which the Christian faithful, together with those who share in pastoral care by virtue of their office in the parish, assist in fostering pastoral activity.” This council can have commissions on faith formation, finance, liturgy, etc. More and more of these PPCs in Eastern Africa include official representatives of SCCs.

¹⁵² Christopher Cieslikiewicz, “Pastoral Involvement of Parish-based SCCs in Dar es Salaam,” in Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton (eds.), *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005 and Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006, p. 99.

This can also be seen in diocesan synods on 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.

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

Next was the AMECEA Study Conference on “Deeper Evangelization in the Third Millennium” in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 2002.¹⁵³ 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 curriculum¹⁵⁴ of the Major Seminaries and houses of formation of both men and women.” This and other recommendations were made in the context of a document on the vision of the association: *AMECEA 2002: A Holy Spirit Filled Family of God Committed to Holistic Evangelization and Integral Development.*”

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

The Church we want to be is a church distributed in parishes that are a communion of communities. A church determined to evaluate and revitalize its

¹⁵³ The colorful blue *khanga* commemorating the meeting has a map of the AMECEA countries and a drawing of a group of Christians (men, women and children) sitting around a table with a *Bible* in the middle with the words:

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

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

AMECEA Celebrations 40th Welcome to Tanzania 40th

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

¹⁵⁴ A variety of SCCs courses and workshops are offered in the major seminaries, theological institutes, universities and houses of formation of both men and women in the AMECEA Region. The most recent example is the Salesian Major Seminary in Nairobi, Kenya that started a required course on SCCs in the combined Second Year/Third of Theology in August, 2011. In an interview with the author on 17 May, 2011 Tanzanian theologian Father Laurenti Magesa emphasized that if SCCs have been a key pastoral priority (not just an option) in the AMECEA Region since 1976 they should have more prominence in the curriculum of seminaries and theological institutes.

religious associations and lay movements and open to the new ways of building up Christian communities at a human size in the line of the AMECEA pastoral priority.

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

“Listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches” (*Revelations 2:7*). We see the phenomenon of SCCs in the Dar es Salaam Archdiocese as a great sign of the times and the powerful voice of the Holy Spirit. By the year 2004 there were more than 2,000 SCCs in the 46 parishes of the archdiocese and their number is ever increasing. There is not a parish without SCCs and the number of SCCs range from 16 up to 117 in a given parish. Structurally it is a large network that truly transforms a parish into a *community of communities*. In this way SCCs help the parish to become really a living community. Without any doubt these communities have become a powerful force of renewal of the parish structures thanks to pastoral decision to make SCCs the priority for the Archdiocese of Dar es Salaam in 1995.¹⁵⁵

The AMECEA Study Conference in Mukono, Uganda in 2005 on “Responding to the Challenges of HIV and AIDS¹⁵⁶ within the AMECEA Region” has one pastoral resolution that emphasizes: "Active involvement of SCCs in reaching out to people with HIV and AIDS. SCC members as caregivers, counselors, etc." This can be extended to SCC members reaching out to refugees, internally displaced people (IDPs), people traumatized by civil war, violence and tribalism/ethnicity, street children, sick people, bereaved people and other needy people.¹⁵⁷

The pattern is clear. As AMECEA meetings were held every three years in different countries in Eastern Africa, the importance of SCCs was emphasized again and again. There has been an on-going momentum for continuing this SCC pastoral priority – a kind of march through AMECEA’s 59-year history. Holmes-Siedle’s evaluation of SCCs in the AMECEA Region after

¹⁵⁵ Cieslikiewicz Christopher, “Pastoral Involvement of Parish-based SCCs in Dar es Salaam,” p. 99.

¹⁵⁶ **HIV** is a virus that may cause an infection, but **AIDS** is a disease or a condition or a syndrome. Being infected with **HIV** can lead to the development of **AIDS** which stands for “acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.” **AIDS** develops when **HIV** has caused serious damage to the immune system. **AIDS** consists of having **HIV** plus having a very low count of CD4 cells. CD4 cells are part of the immune system, and are attacked/destroyed by **HIV**.

¹⁵⁷ Nigerian theologian Father Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, SJ documents the SCCs' outreach to people with HIV AND AIDS and to refugees in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. *From Crisis to Kairos: The Mission of the Church in the Time of HIV AND AIDS, Refugees and Poverty*, Nairobi, Kenya: Paulines Publications Africa, 2005), pp. 86-179.

17 years, the AMECEA Pastoral Department's survey after 20 years¹⁵⁸ and Colombian Bishop Rodrigo Mejia, SJ, the retired bishop of the Soddo Apostolic Vicariate, Ethiopia's evaluation after 26 years set the stage for this present evaluation that now officially covers 47 years (1973-2020).

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

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

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

The survey shows most of the seminaries and institutes in Eastern Africa do not have a specific course on SCCs. But the importance of Small Christian Communities is taught in a variety of courses including *Bible*, Church History, Ecclesiology and Pastoral (Practical) Theology. Some courses have individual lectures and talks on SCCs such as "The Role of Small Christian Communities in Promoting Justice and Peace." There are also a variety of workshops and seminars on SCCs. A new development is seen in the context of SCCs being an official pastoral structure in the parish and diocese.¹⁵⁹ SCCs are treated in some of the new courses such as "Church Management and Administration," "The Internal Ordering on Parishes (Parish

¹⁵⁸ Rereading this survey after 25 years in 2020 one notes this insightful comment: "With all this labor and through many ups and downs. SCCs have become part and parcel of the [Catholic] Church's landscape in Eastern Africa." AMECEA Pastoral Department, "Small Christian Communities 20 Years Later: Insights from an AMECEA Survey and Workshop on Small Christian Communities," *AMECEA Documentation Service (ADS)* 10-11/No. 472/1997 (June/July, 1997), p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ Fritz Lobinger, in commenting on the World Church, and particularly the Global South, states: "The priestless communities of the South have already developed a ministry structure of their own. We just have to build on it." Letter to the author dated 28 September, 2013.

Structures)” “Parish Administration,” “Introduction to Pastoral Communication,”¹⁶⁰ “Pastoral Ministry and Management,” “Pastoral Planning and Organization” and “Social Media/New Media¹⁶¹ in Pastoral Work and Evangelization.” These are being offered as both Electives, Seminars and Short Courses.

The AMECEA Study Conference in Lusaka, Zambia in 2008 was on "Reconciliation through Justice and Peace." It was the 16th AMECEA Plenary Assembly. The role and mission of Small Christian Communities is seen in Action Plan A4: “Revisiting the Small Christian Communities Pastoral Option as a means of responding to the ministry of reconciliation through justice and peace. The theology of the Church Family of God must be further explored in view of enhancing reconciliation and peace building.”

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

¹⁶⁰ The importance of parish-based SCCs was treated in this course at Tangaza University College, Nairobi in 2014 and was part of the exam question: “Imagine a parish setting and discuss how the media may be used more effectively in Pastoral Ministry.”

¹⁶¹ “New media” is more generic. “New media” refers to on-demand access to content anytime, anywhere, on any digital device, as well as interactive user feedback, and creative participation. Most technologies described as “new media” are digital, often having characteristics of being manipulated, networkable, dense, compressible, and interactive. Some examples may be the internet, websites, computer multimedia, video games, CD-ROMS, and DVDs. “New media” does not include television programs, feature films, magazines, books, or paper-based publications – unless they contain technologies that enable digital interactivity. “Social media” is the interaction among people in which they create, share or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks. “Social media” technologies take on many different forms including magazines, internet forums, weblogs, social blogs, microblogging, wikis, social networks, podcasts, photographs or pictures, video, rating and social bookmarking. Technologies include blogging, picture-sharing, vlogs, wall-posting, music-sharing, crowdsourcing and voice over IP, to name a few. Social network aggregation can integrate many of the platforms in use. Examples are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. The boundaries between the different types have become increasingly blurred. In general this book uses the term “social media” because of its link to social networking. See Wikipedia Website, retrieved on 13 April, 2014, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_media and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

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

On 19 March, 2009 in Yaounde, Cameroon Pope Benedict XVI promulgated the *Instrumentum Laboris* ("Working Document")¹⁶² of the 2009 Second African Synod. While the English text of the *Lineamenta* published in 2006 uses the term "living ecclesial communities," the English text of the *Instrumentum Laboris* published in 2009 uses the more common term "Small Christian Communities" (note the capitals). The French text uses "Communautés Ecclésiales Vivantes."

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

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

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

The Second African Synod itself took place in Rome from 4-25 October, 2009 on the theme: "The Church in Africa in Service to Reconciliation, Justice and Peace." No. 22 of the *Message of the Bishops of Africa to the People of God* states: "Here we would like to reiterate the recommendation of *Ecclesia in Africa* about the importance of Small Christian Communities (cf. *EIA*, 89). Beyond prayer, you must also arm yourself with sufficient knowledge of the Christian faith to be able to "give a proof of the hope that you bear" (1 *Peter* 3:15) in the marketplaces of ideas... We strongly recommend the basic sources of Catholic faith: the *Holy Bible*, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and most relevant to the theme of the Synod, *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*." English Bishop Colin Davies, MHM, the former bishop of Ngong Diocese, Kenya sees these resources as "a very complete list of what would be required of SCCs"¹⁶³ in their pastoral activities and evangelization.

¹⁶² Of the 79 footnotes in the 2006 *Lineamenta* only seven are from specifically African sources. Of the 67 footnotes in the 2009 *Instrumentum Laboris* only nine are from specifically African sources.

¹⁶³ Colon Davies, *From Pilot to Pastoral Bishop: Memoirs and Reflections of 53 Years of*

Small Christian Communities are mentioned seven times in the “Final List of [57] Propositions”¹⁶⁴ including:

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

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

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

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

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

A cornerstone of the AMECEA key pastoral priority of building SCCs is *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* that is closely connected to Faith-sharing and faith reflection. Thousands of Lectionary-based¹⁶⁵ SCCs in the nine AMECEA countries meet in the middle of

Missionary Life in Kenya, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2014, p. 114.

¹⁶⁴ It is interesting to analyze the changes in the references to SCCs (both the wording and the emphasis) from the *Linamenta* to the *Instrumentum Laboris* to the “Propositions” to the actual *Apostolic Exhortation*.

¹⁶⁵ Some community of religious sisters and other groups meet together daily, especially in the evening, to read and reflect on the Scripture Readings of the following day following the daily lectionary cycle.

the week to reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday following the three-year lectionary cycle.¹⁶⁶ *Hebrews* 4:12 says:

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

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

Historically Protestants¹⁶⁷ have emphasized the *Bible* more than Catholics in Africa as well as in the rest of the world. This has been changing slowly but steadily.¹⁶⁸ Now African Catholics are much more at home with the *Bible*. A key factor is has been the emphasis of the *Bible* in SCCs, other apostolic groups and *Bible* Study Groups.

Our Eastern Africa SCC Training Team continues to do research on the use of the *Bible*. The reports are mixed. Recent research in 2014 is based on a random sample and not specific quantitative research. Some examples: Three religious sisters in Monze, Zambia were interviewed on a Saturday afternoon. None of them had read the Gospel of the following Sunday (the next day) either individually or in a group. A lay woman in St. Matthias Mulumba SCC in Don Bosco Parish, Makuyu, Nairobi Archdiocese said that “reflecting on the Gospel before hearing it proclaimed at Mass enables her to experience the Word of God more deeply and more personally.” A lay woman in Kenya said that she always reads the daily Scripture Reading on her smartphone. Members of the online Skype SCC said they individually prepare the Gospel

¹⁶⁶ 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.

¹⁶⁷ Some prefer using the term “separated brothers and sisters.”

¹⁶⁸ During a visit of 22 German teachers and students of pastoral theology and their collaborators to Kenya in March, 2015 to experience the Catholic Church in Kenya including SCCs, German layman Mr. Michael Huhn, a representative of Adveniat, said that German Catholics have crossed two thresholds. First, the stereotype that the *Bible* is a book for Protestants. Now the *Bible* is an essential part of the life of the Catholic Church in Germany including the laity. Second, that it is the priest who teaches the meaning of the *Bible*. By reading and reflecting on next Sunday’s lectionary readings in the middle of the week in small groups such as SCCs, German lay Catholics are becoming more *Bible* literate and not just waiting for the interpretation of the scriptures in priest’s homily on Sunday.

text before their weekly *Bible* Sharing. A Catholic evangelist in Kenya said he wants to read the Gospel of the following Sunday ahead of time, but “never seems to get around to it.” For many conscientious Catholics in Eastern Africa, daily *Bible* reading is still not a regular way of life.

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

The [Catholic] Church needs a massive *Bible* education program. The church needs to acknowledge that understanding the *Bible* is more important than memorizing the catechism. If we could get Catholics to read the Sunday Scripture readings each week before they come to Mass, it would be revolutionary.¹⁶⁹ If you do not read and pray the Scriptures, you are not an adult Christian. Catholics who become evangelicals understand this.¹⁷⁰

In another place he writes:

¹⁶⁹ Retired American Cardinal Roger Mahony of Los Angeles Archdiocese, describes an imaginary parish in the future in Los Angeles Archdiocese, California, USA:

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

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

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

¹⁷⁰ Thomas Reese, “The Hidden Exodus: Catholics Becoming Protestants,” *National Catholic Reporter*, 18 April, 2011. National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 5 February, 2012,

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

The Scripture readings during Advent are full of hope. They are an antidote to the cynicism and despair so prevalent in our age. They are worth reading and reflection. Decades ago, I wrote a column in which I encouraged people to "steal a missalette" so that they could read the Scripture readings at home. Today, that is not necessary. The daily readings are [available online](#), through apps (*iBreviary* and *Laudate*), and as podcasts (Daily Readings from the *New American Bible*).¹⁷¹ Reading the daily Scripture readings is a wonderful way to nourish your spirit at any time of the year, but especially during Advent.¹⁷²

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

Magesa explains this challenge in an Eastern Africa context:

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

Where does the SCC get sustenance for its growth and flourishing?
Looking at the example of Jesus himself, we do come up with some essential requirements: they include listening to the Word of God, reflection on it, prayer,

¹⁷¹ For many years in Eastern Africa I have struggled with helping lectors, especially lay people, prepare the readings of the following Sunday or the scripture readings for a SCCs Meeting. For many "preparation" means finding the right page in the *Lectionary* or the *Missal*. I strongly recommend to practice the reading out loud ahead of time. A wonderful resource is the Daily Readings podcast from USCCB.org. A lector can listen to an expert read the passage out loud to get the proper pronunciation, pace, inflection, cadence, style, etc.

¹⁷² Thomas Reese, "Advent Hope," *National Catholic Reporter*, 18 April, 2011. National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 4 December, 2015, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/faith-and-justice/advent-hope>

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).¹⁷³

Thus reading the *Bible* meditatively every day is a good way to discover God's will. The liturgical book resource, *At Home with the Word*, is an excellent guide to a deeper understanding of the Sunday Scriptures with insights from Scripture scholars and action steps. It has additional questions, prayers, citations for weekday readings, and other resources for Scripture study. Whether this resource is used alone or in a group, it deepens our experience of the liturgy and helps one to feel ever more "at home" with the Word of God. It recommends: "Whether you use the book for quiet meditation or vigorous study it will nourish you all week long to act on God's Word in the world as you prepare to hear the Scripture proclaimed on Sunday liturgy." It can be used in families with children, parish households, retreats, Recollection Days, RCIA (the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults or the adult catechumenate), Cursillo, Scripture study groups, adult formation groups and other types of small faith communities and groups.¹⁷⁴

One characteristic of being a lectionary-based Catholic is to choose a particular word or phrase or verse (or an image) from the daily readings, and especially the Sunday readings, -- called a *mantra* --¹⁷⁵ to use as a *Bible mantra* or Gospel *mantra* prayer *mantra* or action verse during the day and during the week. Such a particular word or phrase or verse from the Gospel of the following Sunday can nourish and sustain a person or a small community all day and all during the week.¹⁷⁶ The expressions in **bold** are particularly influential/important/significant.

Some examples:

"Accept the Kingdom of God like a child," "the Advocate, the Holy Spirit will teach you everything," "after he had suffered," "after much debate had taken place," "afterwards he changed his mind," "all are alive for God." "all ate and were satisfied," "all filled with the Holy Spirit," "all that is mine is yours," "all things are possible for God," "announce...proclaim," "anointed with oil many who were sick," "appointed 72 others," "are you envious because I am generous?" "as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved," "as the Father has sent me, so I send you," "as you go make this proclamation: the Kingdom of heaven is at hand," "at once they left their nets," "at your command, I," "at your word I," "bad and good alike," "became white as

¹⁷³ Laurenti Magesa, "The Joy of Community," p. 26.

¹⁷⁴ See *At Home with the Word 2013, Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2013.*

¹⁷⁵ A sound, word, or phrase that is repeated by someone to aid concentration while praying or meditating. Originally in Hinduism and Buddhism. *Mantra* comes from a Sanskrit word meaning "a sacred message or text, charm, spell, counsel."

¹⁷⁶ SCCs in Kenya call this the *nenola uhai* (Swahili for "word of life") that is the guiding word for the entire week.

light," "because of his or her persistence," "because of the hardness of your hearts," "be compassionate as your heavenly father is compassionate," "be doers of the word and not hearers only," "be handed over," "be it done to me according to your word," "be watchful, be alert," "blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth/land," "blessed are the peacemakers," "blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God," "blessed are those who hear the Word of God and observe it," "blessed are you who believed," "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," "behold I am sending the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high," "be merciful to me a sinner," "be opened!" "be vigilant at all times," "book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ," "both the new and the old," "born of the house of his servant David," "bread that I will give is my flesh for the life of the world," "bring glad tidings to the poor," "but Mary sat at home," "but to serve," "by another way/route," "by himself to pray," "by patient endurance you will save your lives," "by prayer and petition with thanksgiving," "by the finger of God I drive out demons," "care for orphans and widows in their affliction," "carry his or her own cross," "children of God," "children of the Most High," "chosen who call out to God day and night," "Christ would suffer and rise," "clothing the naked," "come and see," "come and stay at my house," "come, and you will see," "come, you who are blessed by my Father/blessed by my Father)," "come to me," "the coming of the Son of Man," "community of believers," "compelled by the Spirit, I am going to Jerusalem," "courage," "cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it," "the day was growing hot," "decided to divorce her quietly," "disciples were first called Christians," "do not judge," "do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid," "do not worry," "do to others whatever you would like have them do to you" ("so always treat others as you would like them to treat you"), "do you also want to leave," "do you too want to become his disciples," "endure your trials as discipline," "except this foreigner?" "even if someone should rise from the dead," "fasted for forty days and forty nights," "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do," "the Father who sent me," "the Father will give you another Advocate/Counsellor," "favor of the Lord was upon him," "filled with the Holy Spirit," "firstborn from the dead," "firstborn of all creation," "flee to Egypt," "follow me," "follow me and I will make you fisherfolk," "food that endures for eternal life," "for it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us," "for Jews use nothing in common with Samaritans," "for the life of the world," "for the sake of the gospel," "for this purpose have I come," "for this purpose I have been sent," "For when I am weak, then I am strong," "gives life to the world," "give me a drink," "give me this water," "give the Holy Spirit," "glorify," "go and do likewise," "go and from now on do not sin anymore," "go and tell John what you see and hear," "go first and be reconciled with your brother or sister," "go to the whole world and make disciples of all nations," "go to your inner room," "God causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust alike," "God-Hero," "God does not ration his gift of the Spirit" "God has visited his people," "God is not the God of the dead but of the living," "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son," "God speaks in various ways," "God will see to it that justice is done to them speedily," "good news of great joy," "great cloud of witnesses," "great is your faith," "great mercy," "hand of the Lord was with him," "have faith in God," "have no anxiety at all," "hears the word of the Kingdom." "heavenly Father will give the Holy Spirit," "he cured them," "he had to rise from the dead," "he has filled the hungry with good things," "he must go to Jerusalem," "he must increase, I must decrease," "he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures," "he resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem," "he spent the night in prayer to God," "he taught them as one who had authority," "he was amazed," "he was a Samaritan," "he was transfigured before them," "he went around all of Galilee," "he went away sad for he had many possessions,"

“Herodias harbored a grudge against John,” “here there is no Gentile or Jew, slave or free,” “his disciples remembered that he had said this,” “his mother kept all these things in her heart,” “Holy Spirit and fire,” “Holy Spirit will come upon you,” “Holy Spirit will teach you everything and remind you of all I told you,” “Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name,” “house divided against itself cannot stand,” “household of God, “how beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news,” “hurl him down headlong,” “I am the bread of life,” “I am the Good Shepherd,” “I am the light of the world,” “I am the living bread,” “I am meek and humble of heart,” “I am not worthy,” “I am the resurrection and the life,” “I am the servant of the Lord,” “I am the way and the truth and the life,” “I am with you always, even until the end of the world.” “I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me,” “I chose you and appointed you,” “I face daily the pressure/burden of my concern for all the churches,” “I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ’s afflictions,” “I give thanks to my God always on your account,” “I give them eternal life,” “I go and prepare a place for you “I go and prepare a place for you,” “I go and prepare a place for you “I have called you friends,” “I have come to abolish but to fulfill,” “I have compassion for the crowd,” “I have conquered (overcome) the world,” “I have found my sheep that was lost,” “I have found the coin that I lost,” “I have given you a model to follow,” “I have life because of the Father,” “I have seen the Lord,” **“I must go to the other towns too,”** “I myself will give you words and a wisdom,” “I rejoice in what I am suffering for you,” “I shall place my spirit upon him,” “I want to see,” “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat,” “I will do it. Be made clean.” “I will give you rest,” “I will lay down my life for the sheep,” “I will send to you the Spirit of truth,” “If it dies, it produces much fruit,” “If one member suffers, all suffer together with it,” “If only we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him,” “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts,” “If you ask anything of me in my name, I will do it,” “If you had been here, my brother would not have died,” “If you have faith nothing will be impossible for you,” “If we persevere,” “immediately took counsel against him,” “increase our faith,” “[in Corinth Paul] went to a house belonging to a man named Titus Justus,” “infant lying in the manger,” “In him [God] we live and move and have our being.” “in my Father’s house there are many rooms/dwelling places/mansions/abodes,” “in parables,” “in secret,” “in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, rise and walk,” **“in the power of the Holy Spirit,”** **“in the world you will have trouble/tribulation/suffering, but take courage, I have overcome the world,”** “invite to the feast whomever you find,” “It is the decision of the Holy Spirit and of us,” “It is I. Do not be afraid,” “It is the Lord,” “It is my Father who glorifies me,” “It is not lawful for you to have your brother’s wife,” “Jesus Christ is able for all time to save those who come to God through him,” “Jesus Christ humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death even death on a cross,” “Jesus passed through the midst of them,” “Jesus resolutely determined to journey to Jerusalem,” “Jesus saw Peter’s mother-in-law lying in bed with a fever,” “Jesus sent ahead of him in pairs,” “Jesus sent out these Twelve.” “Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert,” “just have faith,” “the kingdom of God/heaven belongs to these children,” “the kingdom of God will be given to a people that will produce its fruits,” **“the kingdom of heaven is at hand,”** **“the kingdom of heaven is like...,”** **“the kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed,”** “the kingdom of God is yours,” “knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of heaven has been granted to you.” **“lack of faith,”** **“Lazarus was carried away by angels,”** **“lead me in the way everlasting,”** “lead you where you do not want to go.” **“lend expecting nothing back in return,”** **let her keep this for the day of my burial,”** “let us keep awake,” “let us not grow weary in doing good” (another version: “let us not give up in doing good”), “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly,” “let us go on to the nearby villages,” “let

your 'Yes' mean 'Yes,'" "like a mustard seed," "listening to them," **"listen to what the Spirit is saying to the churches,"** "live in the Spirit," "live/remain/abide in me as I live/remain/abide in you," "love our neighbor as ourselves," "love your neighbor as yourself," "Lydia said 'come and stay at my home,'" "makes the deaf hear and he mute speak," "make straight the way of the Lord," "making his way to Jerusalem," "Mary has chosen the better part," "the Master has need of it," "may have eternal life," "may it be done to me according to your word," "may see the light," "members of the household of God," "memorial feast," "message is heard through the word about Christ," "ministry of the Word," "moved with compassion," "must," "must deny himself," "must serve the needs of all," "my grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness," "my kingdom does not belong to this world," "my sheep hear my voice," my words will not pass away, "necessity of praying always and not losing heart/ not to lose heart/without becoming weary," "new teaching with authority," "new wine is poured into new [fresh] wineskins," "ninety-nine in the hills," "not as I will, but as you will," "nothing is impossible for God," "now have I seen," "observe the Word of God," "on account of the Son of Man," "one child/one little one," "the one who does the will of my Father in heaven," "the one who humbles himself or herself," "the one who is least among all of you is the one who is the greatest," "the one who sent me," "the one who treated him with mercy," "only the Father," "on whomever you see the Spirit come down and remain," "opened the Scriptures to us," **"ought not the Messiah/was it not necessary that the Christ suffer these things and then enter into his glory?"**, "out of the depths I call to you O Lord. Lord hear my cry," "peace be with you," "people kept coming to him from everywhere," "Philip proclaimed Jesus to him," "pick up your mat and go home," "poor widow putting in two mites,"/"poor widow put in two very small copper coins," "pray for those who mistreat you," "pray in the Holy Spirit," "pray that you have the strength." "preaching and one who treated him with mercy," "people kept coming to him from proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God," "prepare the way of the Lord," "pressure of my concern for all the churches," "proclaiming the good news of God," "proclaim on the housetops," "proclaim the gospel of peace," "proclaim justice," "put on love the bond of perfection," "put on the Lord Jesus Christ," "put out into deep water," "quiet, come out of him," "receive the Holy Spirit," "recline at table in the Kingdom of God," "reflecting/pondering on these things in her heart," "remains in me and I in him/her," "remember me when you come into your kingdom," "repay to God what belongs to God," "repent," "reported all they had done and taught," "rescue me because of our faithful love," "returned to give thanks to God," "rich in what matters to God," "righteous will shine like the sun," "rise, and do not be afraid," "the sabbath was made for humans," "salvation of God," "stay awake," "seek first the Kingdom of God," "to search/seek out and to save what was lost," "sent them in pairs (twos)," "The Holy Spirit said, 'set apart for me Barnabas and Paul,'" "settled accounts with them," "settle the matter on the way," "shall have eternal life," "sharing your bread with the hungry," "the sign he had done," "some seed fell on rich soil," "sons and daughters of the resurrection," the Son of Man came eating and drinking," the Son of Man is Lord of the sabbath." "the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners and be crucified, and rise on the third day," "the Son of Man will come," "So she [Mary Magdalene] ran," "so they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem," "so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth." "sown on rich soil," "speak the truth in love," "spent the night in prayer," "the Spirit drove Jesus out into the desert," "the spirit of an unclean demon," "the Spirit of God descending like a dove," "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me," "the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot accept," "the Spirit of truth will guide you to all truth," "the Spirit of your Father speaking through you," "standing by the cross of Jesus," "stop judging," "suffer

dishonor for the sake of the name," "suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope," "take courage," "take courage; it is I; do not be afraid," "take Mary your wife into your home," "take up your cross and follow me," "tax collectors and prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God before you," "teach and to preach in their towns," "testify to the truth," "that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us," "that the Word of God may speed on and triumph," "that you may tell your children and grandchildren," "their hearts are far from me," "their lack of faith," "there am I in the midst of them," "there is a baptism with which I must be baptized," "there is neither slave nor free person," "there was given me a thorn in my flesh," "therefore, stay awake/watch," "these little ones," "they abandoned their nets," "they all ate and were satisfied," "they all ate until they had enough," "they departed for their country by another way," "they escorted him to the ship," "they made him carry it [cross] behind him," "they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy," "they set out at once and returned to Jerusalem," "they went forth and preached everywhere," "they went from village to village proclaiming the good news," "**They were all filled with the Holy Spirit,**" "they will be called children of God," "this day you will be with me in paradise," this is how all will know you for my disciples: your love for one another," "this is my body," "This is the will of my Father," "this is truly the savior of the world," "this Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven," "this kind can only come out through prayer," "those who have not seen and have believed," "through accompanying signs," "through the Holy Spirit," "through this belief," "thrown down the rulers from their thrones," "tiny whispering sound," "today you will be with me in paradise," "to fulfill," "together with some women," "to God what belongs to God." "to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst," "to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord," "to seek and save what was lost," "to serve," "transcendent power belongs to God and not to us," "the truth will set you free," "twelve wicker baskets with fragments," "until the whole batch was leavened/rises," "Yes, Lord," "you also must be prepared," "you are all sons and daughters of light/of the day," "you are the light of the world," "you are not far from the Kingdom of God," "you are the Son of God." "you are witnesses of these things," "you cannot serve both God and money," "you did not recognize the time of your visitation," "you have revealed them to the childlike." "you have the words of eternal life," "you must be prepared in the same way," "you ought to wash one another's feet," "you shall love your neighbor as yourself," "you will be able to tell them by their fruits," "you will find rest for your souls," "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you," "your alms may be in secret," "your brother will rise again," "your faith has saved you," "your Father has been/is pleased to give you the kingdom," "your light must shine before others," "wash one another's feet," "was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?" "watch," "water shall come out of it, that the people may drink," "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us," "we await new heavens and a new earth," "well did Isaiah prophesy about your hypocrites," "we must celebrate and rejoice," "we ought to stop troubling the Gentiles," "what Christ has accomplished through me," "what I tell you in the dark, you must speak in the light," "what you have seen and heard," "whatever you ask in my name, I will do, "**Whatever you ask the Father in my name he may give you,**" "when I am weak then I am strong," "when Jesus saw their faith," "when Quirinius was governor of Syria," "when the Son of Man had risen from the dead," "when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed," "where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them," "widow contributed from her poverty," "with God all things are possible," "with the Holy Spirit and fire," "witness," "...will be able to come between us and the love of God," "will of my Father," "who brings from his storeroom both the

new and the old,” “**who do you say that I am?**” “whole city was shaken,” “who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” “whoever does the will of my Heavenly Father,” “whoever eats this bread will live forever,” “whoever humbles himself/herself will be exalted,” “whoever loses one’s life will save it,” “whoever receives me receives the one who sent me [the Father],” “whoever receives one child...receives me,” “whoever therefore humbles himself as this little child,” “who is my neighbor?” “whom he also named apostles,” “woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!” and “worship God in spirit and in truth.”

Reflecting on SCCs in Africa, O’Halloran states: “Once the members take the *Bible* in their hands, reflect on the Word of God and take responsibility to act upon it, things can never be the same again.”¹⁷⁷

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

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

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

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

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

No. 85 on “The Word of God, Marriage and the Family” states: “The Synod also recommended the formation of small communities of families, where common prayer and meditation on passages of Scripture can be cultivated.” This includes a prayerful, meditative

¹⁷⁷ James O’Halloran, *Living Cells*, p. 207.

reading of the *Bible* called *Lectio Divina* (also called “Dwelling in the Word”) and emphasis on a communal reading of the *Bible*. Again this authoritative voice of the pope and the universal church confirmed the direction that the AMECEA countries are taking in building SCCs that are solidly rooted in the *Bible*.

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

The newness of *Lectio Divina* among the People of God requires an appropriate pedagogy of initiation which leads to a good understanding of what is treated and provides clear teaching on the meaning of each of its steps and their application to life in both faithful and creatively wise manner. Various programs, such as the Seven Steps,¹⁷⁸ are already being practiced by many Particular Churches (Local Churches)¹⁷⁹ on the African continent. This form of *Lectio*

¹⁷⁸ This refers to the Seven-Step Gospel Sharing of Lumko (South Africa).

¹⁷⁹ The term Particular Church is enshrined in the documents of Vatican II and the new *Code of Canon Law*. But it is undergoing new meanings in new contexts as explained by Laurenti Magesa:

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

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

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

For me the “Particular Church” is somewhat static. But “Local Church” is dynamic conveying a sense of being alive, growing, evolving. It is interesting that official Vatican documents are using the term “Local Churches” more. For example, Pope Francis's “Message for 2014 World Mission Day” (19 October, 2014) stated: “On this World Mission Day my thoughts

Divina receives its name from the seven moments of encounter with the *Bible* (acknowledging the presence of God, reading the text, dwelling on the text, being still, sharing insights, searching together and praying together) in which meditation, prayer and sharing the Word of God are central.¹⁸⁰

In 2010-2011 the AMECEA Office in Nairobi conducted research on an “Evaluation of AMECEA Pastoral Mission of Evangelization in Solidarity 1961-2011.” The questionnaire was straight forward: “In what ways are you involved in promoting unity and solidarity in the parish and diocese, promoting/participation in Small Christian Communities?” The design of the study emphasized that the decision to start AMECEA and its original constitution as well as the establishment of Small Christian Communities were original and foundational initiatives. In the “Executive Summary” Conclusion 3 under “The key priority challenges facing AMECEA dioceses today continue to be” states: “Promotion of Christian families and Small Christian Communities as means of deepening and consolidating the achievements gained in the last 50 years of evangelization.” De Jong put it this way: “A new missionary period has definitely set in, in which Small Christian Communities play a pivotal role in the evangelization and pastoral system.”¹⁸¹

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

Gulu Archdiocese in Uganda held its Second Archdiocesan Synod on the theme “Called to Build the Church Rooted in Christ’s Love and Truth” from 8-20 May, 2011 with the specific

turn to all the Local Churches. Let us not be robbed of the joy of evangelization! I invite you to immerse yourself in the joy of the Gospel.”

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

¹⁸⁰ *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod of Bishops, XIII Ordinary General Assembly, *The Word of God in the Life and Mission of the Church*, Vatican: Vatican Press, 2008, No. 38.

¹⁸¹ Albert De Jong, *Father Michael Witte of Kabaa High School Missionary and Educationalist: A Study in Mission Strategy*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2011, p. 222.

purpose of developing a five-year Pastoral Plan. Decree 10 under “Lay Apostolate (Adults, Youth and Children)” states: “The Parish Priests and Catechists shall immediately ensure that Small Christian Communities are created and strengthened to model the life of Christians.” In his letter to promulgate the Synod Acts Ugandan Archbishop John Baptist Odama called on Christians at all levels from the diocese down to the family and including the SCCs to implement the deliberations “so that we may grow in our faith and own our church.”

The 17th AMECEA Plenary Assembly on “AMECEA Family of God Celebrating the Golden Jubilee of Evangelisation in Solidarity” took place in Nairobi, Kenya from 27 June to 6 July, 2011. It included a celebration of the successes of SCCs and a reflection on the challenges of SCCs in Eastern Africa especially during the 1973-2011 period. The booklet *AMECEA 50 Years Evangelization in Solidarity: 1961 – 2011* presents a “Timeline” of the history of SCCs in the AMECEA Region. The 40 minute DVD documentary *AMECEA Family of God: Celebrating a Golden Jubilee of Evangelization in Solidarity*¹⁸² focuses on the AMECEA Founding Fathers and stresses the importance of SCCs. It is based on interviews with AMECEA bishops and staff and is produced by Ukweli Video Productions in Nairobi, Kenya. In the section on “Recommendations for the Future” Bishop Rodrigo Mejia has these prophetic words. “AMECEA should try as a kind of strategy for the future to reach countries of the periphery such as Ethiopia that has a very particular Local Church ...using the structures of the Local Church.”

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

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

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

- a. Lay people who are leaders of SCCs (called by many names such as animator or coordinator).
- b. Catechists.¹⁸³

¹⁸² While the DVD has been well received, it has been pointed out that all the interviews are with bishops and priests. No lay people, women or youth are interviewed. One wonders how they will feature in a DVD produced in 2061 on the Second 50 Years of AMECEA.

¹⁸³ In the original plan of SCCs catechists were not the leaders of SCCs, but rather the animators just as the priests and religious men and women. Today they can play a big role such as in Machakos Diocese where they receive special training in the Diocesan Catechist School and are

- c. Religious men and women.
- d. Priests.¹⁸⁴
- e. Seminarians.
- f. Youth.

Resolution No. 5: “Evaluating and Revitalizing the AMECEA Pastoral Option of Establishing Small Christian Communities.”¹⁸⁵

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

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

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

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

significant promoters of the SCCs. Martin Kivuva in a conversation with the author on 3 October, 2013.

¹⁸⁴ Recent workshops for priests include these titles: “The Challenge to Kenyan Diocesan Priests to Be Animators in Small Christian Communities (SCCs).” “Priests Animating the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Model of Church in Kenya Today.” For sisters: “African Sisters as Animators of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa.”

¹⁸⁵ A good example of follow-up/implementation is the November, 2012 research questionnaire designed by Ugandan diocesan priest Father Benedict Mayindwe of Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese, Uganda on “A Pastoral Approach towards the Reawakening of Small Christian Communities in St. Charles Lwanga Catholic Parish, Lwangiri, Uganda.”

Pope Benedict XVI promulgated the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africa's Commitment (Africae Munus)*¹⁸⁶ in Ouidah, Benin in West Africa on 19 November, 2011. Sections related to SCCs are:

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

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

¹⁸⁶ It is a document with 177 numbers and 226 footnotes. There are no footnotes related to specifically African sources such as documents, statements and meetings of national, regional and continental episcopal conferences in Africa. The *literary genre* of recent Papal documents such as the last three *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortations* does not use explicit quotations of local or regional experiences or theological works. A *Simplified Text of Africa's Commitment* edited by the AMECEA Pastoral Department was published in July, 2012 and translations were made in various local African languages as was done after the publication of the *Apostolic Exhortation of the First African Synod* in 1995.

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

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

An Editorial in *Tablet* comments:

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

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

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

COMMENTARY: SCC members on the grassroots have a special opportunity to dialog with members of African Religion. Magesa points out: “It remains to be seen, however, whether this important recommendation will be seriously implemented in the African dioceses, parishes and Small Christian Communities.”¹⁸⁷

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

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

Number 131 under “Lay People:” It can be helpful for you to form associations in order to continue shaping your Christian conscience and supporting one another in the struggle¹⁸⁸ for justice and peace. The Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and the ‘new communities’ are fundamental structures for fanning the flame of your Baptism.”

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

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

It is necessary to maintain simple ecclesial experiences within the reach of all, as well as simple pastoral structures. Experience teaches that large bureaucratic structures analyze the problems abstractly and run the risk of having

¹⁸⁷ Laurenti Magesa, “Translating Theology into Pastoral Action, *New People*, No. 137, March-April, 2012, p. 19.

¹⁸⁸ The word “struggle” is mindful of the common Portuguese call for action: *A luta continua*. *The struggle continues*.

the church far from the people. And, because of this, concreteness is important: the concreteness, that the reality can be touched.¹⁸⁹

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Number 151 under “The Sacred Scriptures:” “Each member of Christ’s faithful should grow accustomed to reading the Bible daily! An attentive reading of the recent Apostolic Exhortation *Verbum Domini* can provide some useful pastoral indications. Care should be taken

¹⁸⁹ “Pope’s Address to Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM),” *Zenit: The World Seen from Rome Daily Dispatch*, 9 February 2015.

to initiate the faithful into the ancient and fruitful tradition of *Lectio Divina*.¹⁹⁰ 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).”

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

The AMECEA Pastoral Department states:

The promulgation of the Apostolic Exhortation, *The Joy of the Gospel* (*Evangelii Gaudium*) by Pope Francis, has challenged us to reflect on ways of proclaiming the Word of God joyfully to all. SCCs provide one of the most effective ways of proclaiming the Word of God through *Bible* sharing. This document “Logical Framework” is aimed at strengthening and promoting the AMECEA model of building the Local Church around SCCs. It provides a systematic structure for on-going formation, evaluation and capacity building in order to make the SCCs at various levels of the life of the Church to be very effective places for evangelization.¹⁹¹

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

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

¹⁹⁰ “As we celebrate the Feast of St. Benedict today we are reminded of the importance of *Lectio Divina* (prayerful, meditative reading of the *Bible*) in our SCCs and applying the daily Scripture readings to our everyday lives.” Small Christian Communities Facebook Page, retrieved on 11 July, 2012, <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Small-Christian-Communities/279921983315>.

¹⁹¹ “The Logical Strategic Framework for the Revitalization and Strengthening of SCCs as a Way of Being Church as Family in the AMECEA Region (April, 2014 – March, 2017),” Nairobi: AMECEA Secretariat, 2014, p. 5.

COMMENTARY: This echoes many synod documents that encourage SCC members to become agents of reconciliation in their own faith communities on the local, grassroots level, in their natural, human communities and in the wider society.¹⁹²

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

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

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

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

I am deeply convinced that Africa is a land of hope. Here are found authentic values which have much to teach our world; they need only to spread and blossom with God's help and the determination of Africans themselves. The Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Africae Munus* can greatly assist in this, for it opens up pastoral horizons and will lead to creative initiatives. I entrust it to the faithful of Africa as a whole, to study carefully and to translate into concrete actions in daily life.¹⁹³

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

In order to encourage reconciliation in communities, I heartily recommend, as did the Synod Fathers, that each country celebrate yearly “a day or

¹⁹² Bukina Faso Scripture Scholar Father Paul Bere, SJ helped me very much to interpret the original French text of this Apostolic Exhortation.

¹⁹³ *Vatican Information Service*, Number 203, 20 November, 2011, Vatican Information Service Website, retrieved on 21 November, 2011, <http://www.visnews-en.blogspot.com>.

week of reconciliation, particularly during Advent or Lent”. SECAM will be able to help bring this about and, in accord with the Holy See, promote a continent-wide *Year of Reconciliation* to beg of God special forgiveness for all the evils and injuries mutually inflicted in Africa, and for the reconciliation of persons and groups who have been hurt in the Church and in the whole of society. This would be an extraordinary Jubilee Year “during which the Church in Africa and in the neighboring islands gives thanks with the universal Church and implores the gifts of the Holy Spirit,” especially the gift of reconciliation, justice and peace.

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

From my own pastoral experience in Africa during the past two decades, I would have expected more discussion of the role of Small Christian Communities (SCCs), and both local and national Justice and Peace Commissions. The SCCs are mentioned in passing in four places and Justice and Peace Commissions only once in relationship to civic education and electoral process. Yet surely these two bodies are of critical importance to the specific promotion of reconciliation, justice and peace.¹⁹⁴

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

Still there are many opportunities for the African SCCs to take the initiative in implementing the recommendations of the Second African Synod on the local level in the year 2013 and beyond. This implementation includes drawing on all the official documents of the synod including the very specific *Propositions*. This includes working closely with Justice and Peace Commissions on the regional, national and parish levels.¹⁹⁵

One example is the growing influence of Protestant fundamentalists and Pentecostals¹⁹⁶ especially through aggressive sects that has been discussed during various AMECEA-level Meetings in the past three years. Number 157 of *Africa’s Commitment* states:

¹⁹⁴ Peter Henriot, “Steps Forward and Back,” *Tablet*, 3 December 2011, pp. 11-12.

¹⁹⁵ One example from Nigeria in West Africa is this report: “23 parishes and over 200 leaders and facilitators were in attendance during yesterday’s Lagos Archdiocesan SCC Workshop at Holy Cross Cathedral, Lagos. Issues of justice, forgiveness and reconciliation were examined based on *Africae Munus*. The mid-year evaluation of SCC activities also came up.” Nigerian layman Raphael Okusaga in a post on the SCCs Facebook Page dated 8 July, 2012.

¹⁹⁶ The Pentecostal Churches in Africa have gone through various historical stages. Thus the use of terms such as “Classical Pentecostalism” and “Neo-Pentecostalism” (that is dramatically increasing in Eastern Africa today).

Various syncretistic movements and sects have sprung up in Africa in recent decades. Sometimes it is hard to discern whether they are of authentically Christian inspiration or whether they are simply the fruit of sudden infatuation with a leader claiming to have exceptional gifts. Their nomenclature and vocabulary easily give rise to confusion, and they can lead people in good faith astray. These many sects take advantage of an incomplete social infrastructure, the erosion of traditional family solidarity and inadequate catechesis in order to exploit people's credulity, and they offer a religious veneer to a variety of heterodox, non-Christian¹⁹⁷ beliefs. They shatter the peace of couples and families through false prophecies and visions. They even seduce political leaders. The Church's theology and pastoral care must determine the causes of this phenomenon, not only in order to stem the hemorrhage of the faithful from the parishes to the sects, but also in order to lay the foundations of a suitable pastoral response to the attraction that these movements and sects exert. Once again, this points to the need for a profound evangelization of the African soul.

¹⁹⁷ As we move toward more inclusive, ecumenical, neutral and even politically correct language, terms that begin with "non" should to be avoided. "Those who are not Christian" is better than "non-Christian." "Those who are not Catholic" is better than "non-Catholic." Referring to a member of a Protestant denomination like Episcopalian (Anglican), Lutheran or Presbyterian as "A baptized person who is not a Catholic" is better than "A baptized person who is a non-Catholic." Certainly Catholics do not like to be called "non" anything: Non-Muslim. Non-Jewish. Non-ordained. We should extend this courtesy to others. Also we should not make the Catholic Church the reference point for describing everyone else. Similar expression such as non-Western should be avoided too. More and more we realize that language and semantics carries a lot of baggage.

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

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

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

It is hoped that strong SCCs can counter the influence of these sects. Committed SCCs can give an ecclesial identity and communal support system to African Catholics to withstand the attraction of the sects. Scripture based SCCs can give African Catholics the confidence and experience to present a Catholic interpretation of the Bible. Recent research indicates that SCC members are more pro-active in using the *Bible* and quoting the *Bible* with their Pentecostal and Evangelical counterparts on the local level.¹⁹⁸

A SCCs Workshop on “How Small Christian Communities in Africa Receive¹⁹⁹ 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 held²⁰⁰ 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.

¹⁹⁸ There is a similar, and even more dramatic, situation in Latin America where the influence of Protestant fundamentalists and Pentecostals including aggressive sects is much greater. *Tablet* reports: “A DEBATE has flared in the Brazilian Church over how to respond to the increasing popularity of Pentecostal churches in the mainly Catholic country, writes Francis McDonagh. At the April [2013] meeting of the bishops’ conference it was suggested that base communities, small church groups in poor communities that try to relate the Gospel to day-to-day problems, might be the best way of countering the drift of Catholics to Pentecostalism.

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

¹⁹⁹ For a full explanation of the meaning of “Reception” see Footnote 169.

²⁰⁰ After living 48 years in Africa I feel the greatest challenge and hardest task is to get an idea, project, activity, etc. working successfully, self-reliantly and permanently on the local, grassroots level – without it being just a “pilot project” or “experimental.” Related to this is coordinate meetings and workshops on the national and continental levels in which SCC members from the local, grassroots level actively participate. This requires huge amounts of time, energy and creativity regarding different languages, customs, travel arrangements, currencies, etc. For people who have not traveled outside their home area there is a wonderful African proverb *A coconut shell filled with water is like an ocean to an ant.*

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

It is therefore not a surprise that two special assemblies for Africa of the Synod of Bishops and their post-Synodal Exhortations, namely: *Ecclesia in Africa* (1995) and *Africae Munus* (2011) challenged SCCs to be in the forefront – SCC members to be agents of reconciliation, justice and peace and the SCCs themselves to be both paths to reconciliation and places of reconciliation.²⁰¹

Bishop Obbo pointed that some of the SCCs were simply prayer groups. “The time has come for SCCs to be elevated to serious *foras* for serious Church discourses such as interpreting and implementing church documents,”²⁰² he emphasized. He added that SCCs have been hailed as a new way of being the Church in Africa.

On the “Historical Backgrounds of SCCs” the official workshop report stated:

In groups based on their home regions, the delegates discussed and presented historical backgrounds, structures, challenges, success and level of participation of their SCCs. They all appreciated and acknowledged the uniqueness and particularity of the origins and historical backgrounds of SCCS in all the regions. Similarly various regions have variant SCCs structures that are determined by locations, issues and the particular people. From the presentations, it clearly came out that SCCs structures are also different and they should be determined by the Episcopal Conferences of particular countries.²⁰³

On the question of the place of the Word of God in the life and mission of these communities, Father Yves-Lucien Evaga Ndjana, Director of BICAM, proposed a paradigm shift of the primitive community of the apostolic era (*Acts of the Apostles* 2: 42-47). He emphasized

²⁰¹ “AFRICA: Prioritize SCCs Bishop Urges Church,” *Catholic Information Service for Africa (CISA) Email News Bulletin*. Issue No. 76, Friday, 28 September, 2012. Available in email message dated 28 September, 2012 and online on the CISA Website, retrieved on 12 October, 2012, <http://a4a0g.s18.it/f/rnl.aspx/?fgc=wvsrxf.dh=n5dd0=tw25a1cc=008&x=pv&7:8j&x=cc&0f:33i dNCLM>

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ “Post Workshop Report: Workshop on How Small Christian Communities in Africa Receive and Implement Magisterial Documents,” St. Joseph’s Spiritual Center, Karen, Nairobi, Kenya, 24-30 September, 2012. Supported by Missio, SECAM and AMECEA, Accra and Nairobi: Privately Printed, 2014, p. 7.

the desire for unity, love in the Lord, Jesus Christ's prayer life and fraternal charity and his mission in the Gospel. The Word of God thus appeared as the essence, the heart and the dynamics of the whole ecclesial basic constitution: it is the Word of God that is born, lives and feeds. A Small Christian Community without the Word of God is only a human association, pretence among many others!²⁰⁴

Recommendations of the workshop were:

- Create a permanent consultative structure for Regional Pastoral Coordinators at the continental level who would help animate SCCs.
- Learn how to integrate SCCs in church movements like the International Young Catholic Students ((IYCS).

One creative idea is to encourage SCCs as Fellowship Groups in the workplace and business establishments. These SCCs can be for Catholics only or can be ecumenical. For example, Catholics in the Bank of Uganda in Lusaka, Zambia have a SCC for prayer, rosary and *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* that meets weekly during the lunch break.²⁰⁵

SCCs continue to be an important part of the "Pastoral Guidelines" of dioceses in Eastern Africa.

The 2013 guidelines of Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya contain eight chapters. Chapter 2 is on SCCs with sections on "Introduction," "Description of Terms," "Composition," "Function of SCCs Leaders," "Recommendations," and "Qualities of Lay Leaders." It states: "All Christian faithful in the Archdiocese of Nairobi should be members of SCCs."²⁰⁶

Lusaka Archdiocese, Zambia has the overall pastoral theme "Called to Be Family of God" in its Five Year Plan (2012-2016). The Year Three (2014) Goal is: "A Year of Re-commitment to the Service of the Church and Adherence to Her Teachings at All Levels." Objective 2 is: "Ongoing formation at all levels of the church structure on Catholic doctrine and the role/purpose of SCCs in the mission of the church."

The Catholic Church in Eastern Africa continues to respond to the contemporary signs of the times. This includes establishing SCCs in Refugee Camps and camps of Internal Displaced People (IDPs). Often the SCCs are part of a parish established in the camps.

²⁰⁴ BICAM -- CEBAM Website, retrieved on 26 February, 2015, <http://www.bicam-cebam.org/newsinfo.php?id=58&lang=en>

²⁰⁵ Febian Pikiti in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya, 18 January, 2013.

²⁰⁶ *Pastoral Guidelines for the Archdiocese of Nairobi 2013*, Nairobi: Archdiocese of Nairobi, 2013, page 17.

The first Case Study is Ngara District in Kagera Region that hosted two refugee settlements (mainly refugees of the Hutu Ethnic Group from Burundi) known as Lukole A and B in northwestern Tanzania. Orobator explains:

The Christian community is organized into seven outstations located in different sections of the camp. Together the outstations make up the refugee “parish.” These outstations are further divided into Small Christian Communities. Each community is run by a team of four people (a man, a woman, a boy and a girl). A total of forty refugee catechists collaborate with the team. According to the chief catechist, Juvenal Niboye, “the SCCs are responsible for the growth and development of the church in the camps”...The SCCs of Lukole regularly identified needier refugees, to whom they offered food and wood for fuel.²⁰⁷

A second Case Study is the Rhino Refugee Camp in Uganda where the Refugee Christian Community “regularly teamed up to cultivate the farms belonging to refugees who had become incapacitated or were elderly.”²⁰⁸

A third Case Study is Lodwar Diocese in northwestern Kenya that opened Holy Cross Parish in Kakuma Refugee Camp. It treats the parish and its pastoral team as any one of the 17 other parishes in the diocese as described as follows:

The 10 major chapels (like outstations) in the parish are divided into 26 Small Christian Communities. This makes pastoral administration, prayer, charitable activities and conflict resolutions easy for the pastors and all commissions involved in the pastoral work in the Camp. Daily services are held in these SCCs... A system has been created whereby needy refugees approach the leaders of the SCCs of the chapels. They are then referred to somebody in the Justice and Peace Commission. A lot of problems can be solved at this level. Others are referred to existing NGOs in the Camp, i.e. Lutheran World Federation, World Vision or the Jesuit Refugee Service. The Catholic faithful are refugees from Sudan, DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, and Somalia.²⁰⁹

Another contemporary response is the pastoral concern and care of single Catholic mothers through the SCCs. Their number has increased dramatically especially in big cities such as Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. When these mothers ask for Baptism of their infants, some SCCs first choose a responsible wife and mother in the SCC to “accompany” the single mother – to explain her responsibilities in raising a child a Catholic and other formation and education issues.

²⁰⁷ Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator, *From Crisis to Kairos*, pp., 149, 196.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

²⁰⁹ Report of Father Frans Thoolen, SMA, Official of the Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People, Vatican Website, retrieved on 7 March, 2013, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/migrants/pom2003_91/rc_pc_migrants_pom91_Thoolen.html

The SCC member is called the accompanier/the person who accompanies in this Ministry of Pastoral Accompaniment.²¹⁰

Then the endorsement of the SCC is sent to the parish before the child is accepted for Baptism. Many of these single mothers are fervent Catholics. Especially in the economically poor areas of big cities such as Nairobi (slums, shanty towns, informal settlements, etc.) they are the leaders of their SCCs.²¹¹

²¹⁰There are many varieties and forms of Accompaniment. Spiritual Accompaniment is common in spiritual direction, spiritual guidance and spiritual discernment. Mission as accompaniment: “While the use of the term ‘accompaniment’ as a model of missionary practice is relatively new...the spirituality and practice of accompaniment, ‘walking with,’ can affect a transformation...the lived spirituality of accompaniment is grounded in the very life of Jesus.” Claude Barbour and Eleanor Doidge, “Mission as Accompaniment” in Stephen Bevans, (ed.), *A Century of Catholic Mission*, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock. 2013.

Qualities of Accompaniment/Accompanying include:

Walking with/Walking along side of
 Start where people are at
 Listening
 Asking questions
 Supporting/Affirming
 Loving presence
 Solidarity
 Compassion
 Advanced Empathy
 Advising/Guiding
 Challenging
 Empowering/Empowerment
 Transforming

²¹¹ The 17 August, 2013 issue of the *Tablet* has a powerful article by Paul Vallely: “How Life in the Slums Changed the Pope.” “As leader of Argentina’s Jesuits, Jorge Mario Bergoglio was a staunch conservative. Now, as Pope Francis, he has put caring for the poor at the heart of his ministry. Here, in a second extract from a new book, the writer traces Bergoglio’s spiritual transformation.” <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/article/164557>

The description of the slums in Buenos Aires is similar to Nairobi and other big African cities: “Regular contact with the poorest of the poor in the Buenos Aires slums played a part. There, Bergoglio learned to see the world differently, said Fr. Augusto Zampini, a diocesan priest from Greater Buenos Aires who has taught at the Colegio Maximo. ‘When you’re working in a shanty town, 90 per cent of your congregation are single or divorced. You have to learn to deal with that Communion for the divorced and remarried is not an issue. Everyone takes Communion’” (page 6).

Retired Bishop Colin Davies (died in 2017) provides an interesting summary of this 1961 to 2012 period. Along with retired Ugandan Archbishop James Odongo, Archbishop Emeritus of Tororo Archdiocese, Uganda and retired Tanzanian Bishop Gervase Nkalanga, formerly of Bukoba Diocese, Tanzania (died in 2015), Davies was one of the last three bishops in the AMECEA Region who participated in the Second Vatican Council in Rome. In a wide ranging interview²¹² he recalled how SCCs are the fruit of Vatican II Ecclesiology. The discovery of Small Christian Communities in the AMECEA countries in the 1970s “was a marvelous novelty that has made the church grow.” He singled out the vibrant church at the SCC level as the greatest mark of ecclesial development on the African continent. Davies also participated in the First African Synod in Rome in 1994 and has witnessed how SCCs have developed as an inculturated model of church from the grassroots.

Magesa adds:

It is in the Eastern African ecclesiastical region (known as AMECEA, acronym for the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa), perhaps more than anywhere else in the Catholic world, where, for close to half-century now, there has been a formal, conscious, deliberate, and extensive ecclesial and ecclesiological effort to promote and sustain SCCs as a foundation of evangelization. Which means that, in Africa, SCCs have not only been a theoretical idea but a practical mission of the church; here SCCs have enjoyed not only theological elaboration and endorsement, but concrete pastoral application.

What, therefore, has come from Africa in the form of SCCs is a blessing of the Holy Spirit to and for the church worldwide. The full potential of community called church in its evangelizing or liberating role can only be realizable if evangelization takes place in SCCs. This is where the pragmatic work of justice, reconciliation, and peace can be fashioned, informed by that supreme joy that can be found only in the Gospel, the good news, of Jesus our Ancestor. SCCs are the way of being church.²¹³

The Argentinian experience of CEBs has many parallels to Eastern Africa SCCs. “What shines through all this change is that Bergoglio is a pragmatist rather than an ideologue. As provincial in the 1970s, he was severe in his instructions to his Jesuits that they must serve only in parishes and not in Liberation Theology’s smaller, bottom-up base communities, where laymen and women took the place of priests and the poor learned to read and interpret the Bible for themselves. Yet, as archbishop, he reversed this attitude, giving the exact opposite instructions. ‘If you can, rent a garage and find some willing layman, let him go there, do a little catechesis, and even give Communion,’ he told his priests. ‘He was also concerned with getting the laity active,’ said his aide Federico Wals, ‘and letting them take charge.’ He wanted it to become a permanent feature of the Church that its mission should not depend on whoever happened to be in charge at any given time” (page 7).

²¹² Colin Davies in an interview with the author in Nairobi, Kenya, 24 March, 2012.

²¹³ Laurenti Magesa, “The Joy of Community,” p. 22.

Pope Francis promulgated *Evangelii Gaudium (The Joy of the Gospel)* in Rome on 26 November, 2013 to close the Year of Faith. This is the Apostolic Exhortation on the meeting of the Synod of Bishops on *The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith* in October, 2012. SCCs are emphasized in relation to the parish in Nos. 29-30 with the key sections in **bold**:

The parish is not an outdated institution; precisely because it possesses great flexibility, it can assume quite different contours depending on the openness and **missionary creativity of the pastor and the community**. While certainly not the only institution which evangelizes, if it proves capable of self-renewal and constant adaptivity, it continues to be the Church living in the midst of the homes of her sons and daughters. This presumes that it really is in contact with the homes and the lives of its people, and does not become a useless structure out of touch with people or a self-absorbed cluster made up of a chosen few. The parish is the presence of the Church in a given territory, an environment for hearing God's word, for growth in the Christian life, for dialog, proclamation, charitable outreach, worship and celebration.²¹⁴ In all its activities **the parish encourages and trains its members to be evangelizers**. It is a **community of communities**, a sanctuary where the thirsty come to drink in the midst of their journey, and a **center of constant missionary outreach**. We must admit, though, that the call to review and renew our parishes has not yet sufficed to bring them nearer to people, to make them environments of living communion and participation, and to make them **completely mission-oriented**.

Other Church institutions, **basic communities and small communities, movements, and forms of association are a source of enrichment for the Church, raised up by the Spirit for evangelizing different areas and sectors. Frequently they bring a new evangelizing fervor and a new capacity for dialog with the world** whereby the Church is renewed. But it will prove beneficial for them not to lose contact with the rich reality of the local parish and to participate readily in the overall pastoral activity of the Particular Church.²¹⁵ This kind of integration²¹⁶ will prevent them from concentrating only on part of the Gospel or the Church, or becoming nomads without roots.

Archbishop Hubertus van Megen, the then Charge D'affaires to Malawi, said that is striking that the pope devotes a lot of space in the apostolic exhortation to the

²¹⁴ Footnote 27 states that this section draws on *Proposition 26* on "Parishes and Other Ecclesial Realities" under "Pastoral Responses to the Circumstances of Our Day" of the 2011 World Synod of Bishops on "The New Evangelization for the Transmission of the Christian Faith."

²¹⁵ Footnote 29, *ibid.*

²¹⁶ An excellent example of integration is the website of the Office of Evangelization, Small Christian Communities and Adult Faith Formation in the Catholic Diocese of St. Petersburg, Florida, USA. It has many SCC Resources. <http://dosp.org/evangelization>

important of the parish in pastoral ministry, evangelization and mission.²¹⁷ This “community of communities” (or “communion of communities”) ecclesiology is fundamental to how SCCs are a new model of church in Eastern Africa today. The parish is indeed a communion of SCCs. It is significant that the pope distinguishes “basic communities” that are best known in Latin American with the more widely used name “small communities.” These SCCs actively participate in evangelization.

The Episcopal Conference of Malawi (ECM) prepared the AMECEA 18th Plenary Assembly on the theme “New Evangelization through True Conversion and Witnessing to Christian Faith” that took place in Lilongwe, Malawi from 16 to 26 July, 2014. In terms of fund raising, Malawian ECM Secretary General Father George Buleya explained that all were involved from diocesan level to the parish level to Small Christian Community level down to the family level and a lot of enthusiasm was shown. “Our Christians were highly involved; they felt the ownership of the event and were willing to support it the best they can.”²¹⁸

During a meeting of 31 SCCs leaders (18 women and 11 men) in Kachebere Parish in Lilongwe Archdiocese, Malawi on 12 December, 2013 I experienced this enthusiasm myself. These simple farmers and housewives in a rural parish were well aware of the coming AMECEA Meeting. They explained that each Catholic contributes 50 Malawian Kwacha to his or her SCC treasurer. This money is forwarded to the Parish Finance Committee and then to the Lilongwe Archdiocese Account for the preparations of the meeting.

One of the topics of reflection during the study session of the AMECEA Plenary was: “New Evangelization as an Opportunity to Work towards True Conversion and Witness to Christian Faith (Emphasis on the Role of Family Life and Small Christian Communities).”

In preparation for the plenary, the AMECEA Pastoral Department²¹⁹ prepared “The Logical Strategic Framework for the Revitalization and Strengthening of SCCs as a Way of Being Church as Family in the AMECEA Region” (April, 2014 – March, 2017). It provides a kind of road map for the implementation of this important area of pastoral priority as enshrined in the Ten-Year AMECEA Strategic Plan (2014 – 2024). It emphasizes four main activities:

1. Promoting SCCs Formation Teams.
2. Promoting Youth SCCs (Parish/Learning Institutions)

²¹⁷ Hubertus van Megen in a conversation with the author, Lilongwe, Malawi on 16 December, 2013.

²¹⁸ George Buleya in “MALAWI: ECM is Set for the 18th AMECEA Plenary Assembly,” *AMECEA Latest News*, 25 October, 2013, AMECEA Website, retrieved on 27 October, 2013 http://amecea.blogspot.com/2013/10/malawi-ecm-is-set-for-18thamecea.html?utm_source=feedburner&utm_medium=feed&utm_campaign=Feed%3A+Am+aceaNews+%28AMECEA+NEWS+BLOG%29

²¹⁹ It has been pointed out that the Pastoral Department is the “heartbeat” or “lung” of AMECEA. The mission of AMECEA is essentially pastoral.

3. Promoting Resource Material for Sharing in SCCs.
4. Promoting SCCs and Faith-sharing Interactions using the Electronic Media.²²⁰

Kenyan diocesan priest Father Ferdinand Lugonzo, the Secretary General of AMECEA, said: “When you look at the broader theme for this AMECEA Plenary, two institutions are crucial: the apostolate of family and its contribution to the work of evangelization and the Small Christian Communities which is a brain child of AMECEA.” He said that the delegates reviewed and reflected on Small Christian Communities to see how effective they are and what gaps and challenges they are facing and proposed what can be done to make them [more] effective means of evangelization.

A special feature of the plenary was on Sunday, 20 July 2014 when the AMECEA delegates took a break from their study sessions and made pastoral solidarity visits to various parish communities in Lilongwe. For example at St. Francis Parish (Kanengo), the 25 Tanzanian delegates comprised of 21 Bishops, two priests and 2 lay faithful were warmly received by thousands of Christians. The liturgy, animated with traditional Malawian hymns and dances, was presided over by Tanzanian Bishop Tarcisius Ngalalekumtwa, Bishop of Iringa and President of the Tanzania Episcopal Conference. In his homily the Archbishop of Arusha, Tanzanian Archbishop Josephat Lebulu said that the Risen Christ through the Holy Spirit is working with the AMECEA Church all the time and that is why the inspiration made by the AMECEA Church in instituting the Small Christian Communities is desired by churches in other parts of the world as an effective strategy for evangelization.²²¹

The “Communiqué of the 18th AMECEA Plenary Assembly in Lilongwe, Malawi (16th to 26th July, 2014)” under “New Evangelization to Address New Challenges” stated:

We endeavour to deepen evangelization and employ various methodologies to ensure true catechesis, true conversion, true spirituality and true witness to Christian faith in AMECEA region and beyond. We encourage all Catholics to participate actively in Small Christian Communities. As shepherds we commit ourselves to ensuring that Small Christian Communities continue being places for the true experience of faith.

“Place” is a key word here. Over the past 10 years Catholic Church documents at all levels have emphasized that the SCC (the church in the local neighborhood) is the actual place or

²²⁰ “The Logical Strategic Framework for the Revitalization and Strengthening of SCCs as a Way of Being Church as Family in the AMECEA Region (April, 2014 – March, 2017),” Nairobi: AMECEA Secretariat, Unpublished Article, 2014, pp. 2-4.

²²¹ Adapted from Philip Odii, "Malawi: AMECEA Delegates Visit Parish Communities in Lilongwe Archdiocese," *AMECEA Online Newsletter Special Plenary Assembly Issue 005*, 21 July, 2014, retrieved on 24 July, 2014, http://amecea.blogspot.com/2014/07/malawi-amecea-delegates-visit-parish.html?utm_source=AMECEA+Newsletter&utm_campaign=a6dbddd43-AMECEA_Online_Newsletter_6_5_2013&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_85fa866553-a6dbddd43-67462977

physical location/setting where the following happen (in alphabetical order): *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection*, communion, conversion, counselling, deeper evangelization, family catechesis, family life apostolate, formation, friendships, healing, justice and peace, marriage catechesis, mercy, mutual support, new evangelization, pastoral care, prayer, reconciliation, relationships, religious education, school of faith, service, shaping Christian consciences, training, transformation, unity and witness.

The AMECEA Countries were involved in the III Extraordinary World Synod of Bishops on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization," that took place in Rome from 5-19 October, 2014. This synod "defined" the "*status quaestionis*" (Latin for "state of the question") of the topic of the family and marriage. The next synod – officially called the Synod of Bishops XIV Ordinary General Assembly -- took place in Rome in October, 2015 and recommended working guidelines in the pastoral care of the person and the family.

This connected with many AMECEA dioceses that celebrated 2014 as "The Year of the Family." This flowed into the World Meeting of Families on the theme "Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive" that took place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA from 22-27 September, 2015.

Eastern African SCCs were involved in this whole process. More information and examples can be found in Chapter 12 on "SCCs Promote Family and Marriage Ministry in Eastern Africa."

The 50th Anniversary of the close of the Second Vatican Council was on 8 December, 2015. With many books and articles being written and conferences held, the "Reception of Vatican II" was widely discussed.²²² This was an opportunity to revisit Catholic Church history

²²² "Reception" of a document or teaching in the Catholic Church is a rich and meaningful word in term of its theological and pastoral implications. "Reception" has been understood as one of the *munera*, or gifts, of the church from its beginning. This gift is exercised by the People of God who constitute the church and is given to the everyday Catholics who express the *sensus fidei fidelium* and the *sensus fidei*. Reception is a gift through which the sense of the faith of the faithful is authoritatively expressed. Reception is the foundation of the sense of the faith and of the faithful community. Recognition by reception is a form of consensus formation in a church that understands itself as a community of Local Churches. While we may have many good ideas and intentions in the communications process, ultimately it is the "receiver" who decides what is received and how it is acted upon. Some meanings/responses (alphabetically):

acceptance
 adherence
 agreement
 assent
 attentiveness
 deny assent
 disagreement
 endorsement
 indifference

in Africa and to evaluate and to learn from the past 50 years. From the perspective of SCCs in Eastern Africa we are rediscovering the importance of two of the main founders -- Kalilombe and Mwoleka. Their vision of the theology and praxis of Vatican II's Communion Ecclesiology helped create the path for the establishment and development of Eastern African SCCs. Other key people were Ndingi and McCauley.

Over these years we have seen the slow, gradual shift of SCCs in Eastern Africa from being small prayer groups that are inwardly focused to active Small Faith Communities that are outwardly focused including justice and peace issues. This may be the number one challenge to SCCs in Eastern Africa. Many are still prayer groups (emphasizing especially the rosary and popular devotions)²²³ and not concerned with the wider social issues. Many SCCs still shy away from justice and peace concerns. The challenge of Ugandan historian/theologian Father John Waliggo (who died in 2008) and Magesa has encouraged the SCCs in Africa to become more involved in justice and peace issues and social action.

Overall in Eastern Africa the SCCs Model of Church is a strong Pastoral, Ecclesial Model, but it has been less successful as a Social Action Model.

Kalilombe, one of the original architects of the SCCs plan in Eastern Africa, emphasizes that in the different stages of growth in SCCs the final stage is the "Transformation of Society." This means going beyond superficial changes to tackle the necessary structural and systemic changes in our society such as facing the underlying tribal and negative ethnic group tensions in Kenya and other countries today, corruption/graft, insecurity and ongoing poverty. A process/methodology such as the Pastoral Spiral can help in this transformation.

irrelevance
obedience
rejection

Summary of Eugene Cullen Kennedy, "Can Catholics Disagree Only When They Agree With the Church?" *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, 30 July 2014, National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved 15 August, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/bulletins-human-side/new-sensus-fidei-document-can-catholics-disagree-only-when-they-agree>

An important document is John Henry Newman, *On Consulting the Faithful on Matters of Doctrine* (1859).

²²³ Research in the rural areas of Luganda speaking dioceses of Uganda such as a Masaka Diocese in 2013 indicate that SCCs mainly meet in May and October for the rosary and devotions to the Blessed Mary. Ugandan layman Richard Kakeeto, conversation with author in Nairobi, Kenya, 26 November, 2013.

NOTE: This first historical chapter covers 1961 to 2015. It is “a work in progress.” The great advantage of online writing is that you can edit, change and add as you go along. Professional historians say that you cannot write accurate critical history about the recent past. You have to wait to let time take its course. So we will treat 2016 on later. This particular chapter focuses on the 1973 to 1979 period to highlight the origin of the SCCs Model of Church in Eastern Africa.