Origin and History of the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website (2004 to 2021)

www.smallchristiancommunities.org)

By Joseph G. Healey, MM

Turning over the "Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website" to the AMECEA[1] Pastoral Department in Nairobi, Kenya on 1 January, 2021 challenged us to dig deeper to trace the origin and history of our website.

The plan for the "Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website" was hatched during the National Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Convocation in San Antonio, Texas, USA in August, 2002.[2] A very good explanation of the early history is found in Barbara Darling, "Small Christian Communities in North America Collaborative Website" (pages 182-184) in Joseph Healey, Chapter 26, "Promoting SCCs Via the Internet," in Joseph Healey and Jeanne Hinton (eds.), *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005 (Second Printing 2006, New Cover 2014); Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2006 (1st Reprint 2011, 2nd Reprint 2012, 3rd Reprint 2017); and Bangalore: Claretian Publications, 2006.

Darling writes:

> Thirteen U.S. and Canadian organizations [connected to SCCs] are exploring creative answers by looking at ways they can collaborate in their service to SCCs. Six hundred members and representatives of these organizations convened in San Antonio, Texas, USA in August, 2002. At that gathering and at a subsequent summit of leadership in 2003, it became apparent that a more collaborative model of North American SCCs support and networking was crucial. The decision was made not only for financial reasons, but because this mutuality of purpose and effort reflects the model of Small Church Community among the groups. Yet this metamorphosis of SCCs support in North America is intentionally

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[1] 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).

[2] A seed was sown during the Second International Consultation on Small Christian Communities at Notre Dame, Indiana, USA in October, 1996. One recommendation was to explore the role of SCCs in the World Wide Web (WWW).

a slow process. Particular emphases among the groups such as evangelization, resource development, the connections between SCCs and the catechumenate, leadership training, multicultural church, scriptural literacy, young adults and the diversity of parish-based and community-based small church must be recognized, included, and respected by the whole.

The first concrete result of this loose confederation [of organizations connected to SCCs] is a website that displays links to individual websites of the organizations. Web surfers in North America will find a multitude of services available to SCCs and can easily choose those that fit their current needs. Those outside North America will likely find resources and wisdom to complement their small church experiences as well. Strategies are being developed to work collaboratively in other areas so that there is little overlap of services, yet no needs go unmet in North American SCCs.

The website officially began as the "Small Christian Communities in North America Collaborative Website" by RENEW International in its office in Plainfield, New Jersey, USA in 2004 under the coordination of Michael Brough, the Director of RENEW International with the domain name www.smallchristiancommunities.org. The website was funded by RENEW International and the Copyright was by RENEW International in 2004. The website was designed by Jennifer Lyden who worked with Barb Darling.[3] It was set up on a voluntary basis.

Barb Darling agreed to be the first part time volunteer moderator. Her role was coordinator/networker/channel of information rather than providing original content (writing articles, posting new material, etc.) The growth of the website was slow. Some national SCC leaders did not have a clear vision of our digital and internet future. The different national organizations failed to agree on a common or joint "Online SCCs Calendar." Yet a new section called "What's New in SCC Resources" was added in 2005.

The report of the 2007 National Joint Convocation of SCCs in St. Paul, Minnesota, USA from 9-12 August, 2007 and the Follow-Up Conference at the Benedictine Center, Maplewood, Minnesota, USA from 27-29 November, 2007 stated:

Given the presence of participants from 11 other countries throughout the world, there also emerged a desire for continuing networking with each other and with efforts here in the United States. A very concrete follow up was immediately pursued. Following the 2002 National Joint Convocation on Small Christian Communities in San Antonio, a collaborative website was established with the address www.smallchristiancommunities.org. Unfortunately, beyond that initial effort of bringing together information about, and links to, the various organizations and venues with an interest in Small Christian Communities, there was no extended

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[3] In a wide-ranging conversation of 1 hour and 45 minutes, we discussed the origin and history of the website. We used the saying *Go digital or die.* The Covid-19 pandemic has provided a *kairos* moment for the present website and for new online/virtual/digital SCC activities and resources. Author's smartphone conversation with Barb Darling, 6 February, 2021.

follow up. On the initiative of Father Joseph Healey, MM, a member of the international network that emerged at the convocation, this website, now under new management, has been re-configured as the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website. It is now organized by continent and is beginning to offer a range of very interesting materials from various parts of the world.

An international volunteer team was formed for website development and maintenance including Charles Gikera,[4] Joseph Healey, Caroline Adams, Jennifer Ehrentraut, Xavier Thelakkatt and Belza Ramos.

The website was officially handed over from Terry Rickard, the Director of RENEW International, to Joseph Healey, the present Moderator of the website in 2007. A Conference Call in September, 2007 with Deirdre Malacrea, Web Minister of RENEW International and Chuck Bary of Veraciti Hosting Service resulted in the transfer to the new hosting system CNET Global Inc. based in Canada. The transfer of the files, the domain name and copyright was complicated. First from RENEW International in Plainfield, New Jersey, USA to the Healey Development Office in Morristown, New Jersey, USA. Then from the Morristown office to our new webmaster Nicholas Adongo in the Urban Ministries Serving God (UMSG) Office (under Mike Kofski) and the Society for the International Ministries (SIM) Office (under John Shane) in Nairobi, Kenya.

From a continental website it became an international website. Different continental pages were created. At that time our new webmasters in Nairobi, Kenya -- Nicholas Adongo assisted by Charles Gikera - set up an independent website with a new name -- the "Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website."

"Global" means it is international and worldwide.

"Collaborative" means that a wide variety and rich diversity of people share and work together to promote this SCC Model of Church:

Men and women.
Old and young.
Different religious denominations including Anglican, Catholic, Mennonite, Pentecostal, and Southern Baptist.
People from different places in the world. This is seen in the "Welcome Message":

> **Welcome!** (English) **Bienvenue!** (French) **Bienvenido!** (Spanish) **Willko mmen!** (German) **Karibuni!** (Swahili) **Namaste!** (Hindi) **Hwan-yõng-ham-ni-da!** (Korean) **Kia Ora!** (Maori) Our eight language "Welcome" represents a variety of languages commonly spoken on each of the six continents. With a vision to establish a global collaborative networking website for Small Christian

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[4] In a wide-ranging conversation of 1 hour and 50 minutes, we discussed the origin and history of the website. By reviewing the history of his email messages, Charles verified that he joined in SCC Team in September, 2007. Author's Zoom conversation with Charles Gikera, 9 February, 2021.

Communities (SCCs) worldwide, we share SCCs contact information, events, materials, and news from each of the six continents (Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and Oceania).

SCCs specialists and grassroots SCCs members.
Different languages, countries and cultures.

Our SCCs collaboration also expresses how SCCs are "a new way of being church" and a "new pastoral model of church." The operation of the website is done in a collaborative, joint responsibility, teamwork, synodal way.

Many of these ideas were presented in "Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website" –a PowerPoint Presentation by Caroline Adams, Joe Healey, Bob Pelton, Belza Ramos and Xavier Thelakkatt at the National Alliance of Parishes Restructuring into Communities (NAPRC) Conference in Erie, Pennsylvania, USA on 25 July, 2009. It was proposed to have an "International Section or Page" for international stories. This later became the website page "SCC Stories Databases."

Over the years many people have helped. We have the worldwide proverb *Many hands make light work.* There is a Uganda proverb *One hand washes the other.* The names and responsibilities have changed, evolved, been added to. Presently in February, 2021 the website states: "For more specific concerns, please contact one or more of the following people who are jointly responsible for the SCCs Global Collaborative Website:

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From 2007 to 2020 the host was CNETGlobal Inc. directed by Sam Wanyoike.[5] Charles Gikera joined Nicholas Adongo in the internet responsibilities and tasks. Charles took over completely as webmaster after Nicholas went to the USA to focus on graduate studies. Presently the webmaster is Bernard Mberere assisted by Charles Gikera and Peter Kyalo. The present Host is HostGator (Texas, USA). The website started in the Joomla Content Management System and transitioned to WordPress. Our sister website is the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website at https://afriprov.org.

The Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website is a "work in progress". We make changes and add material regularly. Our Main Menu contains: Home and then, alphabetically: Archives, Book Reviews, Contact Us, Ebooks, Links, Online SCCs, Photo Gallery, SCC Poll Archives, SCC Poll, SCCs Resources, SCC Stories Databases, Videos and Presentations on SCCs and Vision.

Our "Front Page" has a colored map of the world and features on "What's New" and "Calendar of Events." A popular feature is the SCC Polls on the question "The best part of my

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[5] In a wide-ranging conversation of 1 hour and 16 minutes, we discussed how the Christian Churches were ahead of the digital revolution in Kenya. I saw my first computer (that used perforated cards) in Dr. David Barrett's Unit of Research Office of the Anglican Church in downtown Nairobi in 1968. The first organization to use computers for field research was the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) that translates the *Bible* into little known languages in rural Kenya. Author's smartphone conversation with Sam Wanyoike, 5 February, 2021.

Small Christian Community is… " We encourage people to vote often.[6] There is a link to our interactive Small Christian Community Facebook Page.[7] We have a feature on Online SCCs. We started the St. Isidore of Seville International Online Skype SCC in 2012 to reflect on the gospel of the following Sunday and connect it to our daily life.

Here are the oldest articles on our website:

1. Under "United States of America" under "North America:" Article on SCCs in *National Catholic Reporter*, 28 September 2007.

2. Under "Kenya" under "Africa:" Article on a SCCs Workshop in Nairobi, Kenya on 21-22 February, 2008.

3. Under "African Continent" under "Africa:" Article on SCCs in Africa from a SCCs Course at Tangaza University College in March, 2008.

Over the years there have been some articles in Spanish, French and Swahili, but more are needed.

Presently the countries with the most online articles are:

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[6] The poll is an interesting mirror of the SCCs' life and activities worldwide. In creating the poll we have done careful research on, and analyzed feedback from, surveys, questionnaires, interviews, personal conversations, articles, email messages, Facebook Pages, visits to SCCs and conferences on SCCs. We have studied carefully the contemporary signs of the times such as the Covid-19 pandemic and pastoral changes in our parishes. So far we have identified 1437 important characteristics or features of SCCs around the world mainly provided by Small Christian Communities (SCCs) members themselves: 740 on the dynamics/process/principles/ classifications of SCCs and 697 on the activities/content of SCCs. We choose six characteristics or features of SCCs for each poll that is changed every two months. Presently we are in Seventy-First Round that covers January-February, 2021.

[7] As of 15 February, 2021: Society & Culture Website: 2,569 likes and 2,623 follows. Google Analytics shows that visitors to the SCCs Website come from 81 countries/territories. The largest number of visitors comes from Kenya, United States, India, Philippines, United Kingdom and South Africa in that order.

As of 15 February, 2021 in our browsers: Entering "Small Christian Communities," our SCCs Website ranks:

No. 1 on Google Search Engine (Google Chrome, Mozilla Firefox and Internet Explorer Browsers).
No. 2 on Bing Search Engine (Microsoft Edge Browser).

61: Kenya
59: Africa Continent
37: USA

We have four free Ebooks. One Ebook is:

Healey, Joseph, *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 1,198 pages as of 15 February, 2021 on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website:
https://smallchristiancommunities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Build_new.pdf

The Ebook has 19 chapters. To continue to read, and to respond to, the contemporary signs of the times, the latest three chapters are:

1. "Tracking the Growth of Young People Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs)."

2. "Online Small Christian Communities."

3. "The Role of Small Christian Communities in the Synodal Path/the Synodal Church."

Since our overall priority in the AMECEA Region is the on-going formation and training of Small Christian Community (SCC) leaders and members in Eastern Africa, the Ebook contains 27 basic printed SCCs E-Resource materials that are available free online on the SCCs Website.

We are updating our "Links Page" by updating the original 13 links in the Darling article and add new ones. The page on "Videos and Presentations on SCCs" is growing. From our research the emphasis on SCCs Twinning is lessening.

An interesting lens into the history of our website is the Archives Page. Presently there are 78 entries dating from 5 April, 2008 to the beginning of 2021.

As I review our 17 year history of the website (2004 to 2021), I am struck by how many times we have bounced back from, and overcome, multiple technical failures, internet crashes, digital errors, security issues, difficulties in international communications, hacking, computer hardware challenges, lack of good internet connectivity, financial challenges, sickness and personal issues, challenges of handing over to new personnel, the Covid-19 pandemic and other changes/problems/obstacles.[8] As this international history also shows, changes in personnel and leadership amongst managers and contributors have sometimes slowed down the management,

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[8] Perhaps our most dramatic moment happened when our sister website – the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website -- totally crashed and its two Mirror Websites in the USA also crashed. Nicholas Adongo, our webmaster in Nairobi, spent two days rebuilding the website from scratch.

development, and growth of the collaborative website. It says a lot that despite all of these challenges, this important website continues to go strong.

The present Copyright at the bottom of the Home Page is:

© [Copyright] 2004-2021 Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website. All rights reserved -- AMECEA Pastoral Department.

We welcome the Local Church in Eastern Africa through the AMECEA Pastoral Department, based in Nairobi, Kenya, assisted by the AMECEA Information Communications Technology (ICT) Coordinator within the AMECEA Social Communications Department to take the responsibility and overall leadership of the website.

As Charles Gikera said recently: "Our whole IT team has really worked hard for the success of the two websites. It has been a real team effort." Bernard Mberere added: "After over 13 years as a SCC IT team, congratulations for the consistency." Our whole IT team has really modeled SCCs as a way of life and the SCCs Model of Church. We have not just talked the talk; we have walked the walk -- together.

Looking to the future: As the Spanish proverb used by SCCs around the world says: *We create the path by walking.*

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