

Small Christian Community and my Growth as a Catholic

By Juma Theophilus, Bachelor of Pharmacy.

The Catholic church has been home to my Christian nourishment and empowerment since I was born. Born and raised in a staunch Christian catholic family, I always looked forward to Sundays, when I would wear my best clothes and accompany my grandmother to church. That is, however, not all. If my memory serves me right, I remember that every Wednesday afternoon was a time for prayers which I later understood to be a Small Christian Community (SCC).

The word stems from a Swahili word, kujumuika, which means to gather for a particular course. Therefore, in this case, our gathering was for sharing the word and singing. I consolidated my memories and experiences from a village in Bungoma County, in the Western region of Kenya. I attended Mateka Sub Parish today, Kimatuni Parish, in the extensive Bungoma Diocese. The sub-parish was further divided into different jumuiyas, and mine was St. Thaddaeus.

I come from the Luhya community, which loves entertaining guests with tea. Therefore, every afternoon of jumuiya served as an opportunity for more tea and mandazi. As I accompanied my grandmother to these sessions, I found it fun since there was always motivation attached to it. What I did not know is that my discipline to remain prayerful was growing, and with time, I could recite some catholic prayers in my mother tongue.

The dynamics in the village were interesting; moving from one jumuiya to another was considered a big opportunity to merry. While people had an opportunity to merry, I would see my grandmother strike friendships, some of which I see them thriving to date. She has friends who still visit and check up on her even as she enjoys her graceful aging process, now clocking 85 years.

Fast forward, I joined Kenyatta University, Main Campus and the first place I found a home was a Small Christian Community. I joined a community of young people with a sense of belonging, the St. Catherine of Sienna SCC. We always met on Wednesday evenings; this was so convenient because we met in my residence region. I found it a bit challenging initially since I could only recite the prayers in my mother tongue. I took it a step at a time, starting with the rosary, and after two semesters, I had some degree of confidence even to lead the session.

One thing that stood out for me was how the meetings in the SCCs set the pace and plan for the subsequent Sunday. Importantly, we would read and reflect on the gospel of the coming Sunday. Through this plan, I acknowledge that I grew in faith as I would look forward to Sunday sermons and worship. Importantly, I meditated and reflected on my Christianity while tracking my growth.

Therefore, for me, a jumuiya is not just a place of prayer and bible sharing. It offers me a sense of belonging, communion and spiritual growth at a personal level whose impact I cannot

compare with anything else. I believe the backbone of this is deeply hewn in scripture, Hebrews 10:24-25 “..... not forsaking the assembling of ourselves...” (KJV). I got a chance to shake off my social phobia, which led to my holistic growth as an individual.

The student community of a Small Christian Community also allows one to get out of themselves by doing good works and touching the lives of the unfortunate. On numerous occasions, I remember our trips to children’s homes, elderly homes and hospitals to pray with the less fortunate while giving them presents. I learned the need to put others before myself, which significantly contributed to my quest for servant leadership, which sits close to my heart.

The engagement and participation in the Small Christian community significantly contributed to my all-around Christian grooming. During all the happenings, I did not know that involvement in the jumuiya prepared me for a greater calling. In participating in the jumuiya, I was spotted and assigned the responsibility to lead the church as the chairman in 2016, working under Fr. Lance Nadeau at Christ the Teacher, Kenyatta University Catholic Church. At this point, I could interact with and consider the jumuiyas in a different light. The jumuiyas at the university would take place in the evenings, mostly on Wednesdays and Thursdays.

At the university, there were 5 jumuiyas for the students: St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Sienna, Sts. Perpetua and Felicity and St. Michael. There was one jumuiya for the non-students and recent graduates, St. Augustine and one for the Teaching and Non-Teaching Staff for the University, Cardinal Otunga. This kind of break down essentially provided every member with a sense of belonging within the church.

One important thing about the Small Christian communities is that they are further divided into smaller units in the name of families. The families offered an ideal opportunity for the members to interact and share at a closer level. Members of the families constantly visited each other at their places of residence. These meetings reminded me of the prayer sessions I had witnessed in the village growing up.

In the beginning, service in the church was such a big assignment, but I hold close to my heart that working with fellow students is motivating. The students in the Small Christian Communities at the University are always ready and willing to give everything for a worthy course. I have witnessed some of the relationships created in the Christian Communities nurtured to higher levels, being even helpful post-graduation. I have seen great marriages and working partnerships grow from the jumuiyas.

Working with the communities and the appointment to the parish executive council was a different experience. How I do things to date is partly informed by the lessons I obtained during my encounters at Kenyatta University. I got an opportunity to work with the jumuiyas at a closer level, demonstrating further spiritual and personal growth.

To date, I love SCC and always look forward to the next gathering. To further expand my scope and interest in Small Christian Communities, I joined St. Augustine Small Christian

Community, mainly made of Kenyatta University alumni, with whom we meet every Sunday to share and reflect.

Ideally, this allows me to start the week differently, committing every plan to prayer. More to the sharing, just like the other SCCs, we read and share the gospel of the following Sunday, which I believe is a preparation for the next worship. Besides, the members can share different aspects of life, including employment, marriage and relationships, technology and religion. Senior members of the Community also hold hands with the recent graduates and guide them into approaching the job market.

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