

## **Brief Timeline of the Long History Between LIM and AMECEA**

By Joseph G. Healey

**NOTE:** We are grateful for the 35-year close working relationship and friendship between LIM (Loyola's Institute for Ministry) and AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa). Praise be to God. Sadly most people do not know this history. Together I hope we can appreciate more, and learn more, from our long history. I hope we can get to know each other even better.

- In **1989** Father Bernard Lee, SM was named chair of the Religion Department at Loyola University in New Orleans, Louisiana, USA and director of the Loyola's Institute for Ministry (LIM).
- Starting in **1991** Father Joe Healey, MM, as part of the AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa) Delegation that included Alphonce Omolo, began meeting Father Bernard Lee, SM at international Small Christian Communities (SCCs) conferences especially coordinated by Father Bob Pelton of Notre Dame.
- Bernard Lee and Michael Cowan wrote *Conversation, Risk, and Conversion: The Inner & Public Life of Small Christian Communities* published by Orbis Books at Maryknoll, NY in **1997**. Presently out of stock. Paper copies of the original book available from Amazon. Electronic copy not available from Amazon. Very influential book worldwide and still used as a textbook in our online SCC Courses.

(one of the nine AMECEA countries) made SCCs a Pastoral Priority in **1997** and sent

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- In this same book in **2005** Lee and Cowan wrote the article "Priority Concerns of SCCs in American Catholicism" based on the SCCs Convocation at St. Mary's University in San Antonio, Texas, USA in **2002**. The article concludes with these words: "The two of us writing this chapter believe that these are coherent and accurate priorities. How responsive Small Communities will be to some or all of them remains to be seen. **Without very effective national organization efforts of some kind, these priorities are less likely to be addressed effectively.**" (Page 70, my bold).

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18 years later we realize that some of these national SCCs organizations have closed or become dormant. If we are to rewrite this article today, we would emphasize that these priorities can be effectively carried out today through online SCCs national and international networking – that may or may not be connected to national and international SCCs organizations and gatherings (in-person, on-line and hybrid). This online networking includes interactive websites, Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, YouTube Archives/Storage and other social networks. One example of this new online SCCs national and international networking is “Mikroi – Today’s American Catholic (TAC)’s Initiative on Small Christian Communities (SCCs)” that will be described later. Another example is this message on our [SCCs Facebook Page](#) from Michael Brough, a LIM graduate: "Many blessings for a fruitful synodal dialogue in your Zoom Call today. May the Holy Spirit strengthen the important bonds between LIM and AMECEA and may Small Christian Communities continue to flourish as a result."

- In this same book in **2005** Barbara Fleischer wrote an article on LIM entitled “An Experiment in Online Education for Small Christian Community Leadership.”
- When American theologian Bernard Lee visited Kenya in the **2000s** he studied the SCCs Pastoral, Ecclesial Model of Church in Eastern Africa (the nine AMECEA countries) where the SCC is an official, pastoral, ecclesial structure in the parish. Each SCC (or a group of SCCs) has a representative on the Outstation, Subparish and Parish Pastoral Council. Elections start at the level of SCCs and move upwards. This ensures that the Parish Pastoral Council leaders are chosen from those lay people who are already leaders in their SCCs – thus true representation from below. Lee thought that this systematic pastoral plan and leadership structure from below was the most significant feature of SCCs in Eastern Africa.
- **21 May, 2021:** Memorandum of Understanding Between Loyola University New Orleans and the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa about the “Small Christian Community Leadership Project.”
- In our more recent history we have Kenyan Diocesan priest Father Lawrence Murori and Kenyan layman Alloys Nyakundi getting their Master’s Degree of Pastoral Studies with an area of concentration in Small Christian Community Formation in **May, 2019**. This week in **May, 2023** we celebrate Kenyan Loretto Sister Jane Frances Mulomgo, IBVM getting this same degree.
- The Kenyan layman Alphonse Omolo’s report on four online LIM courses that he taught: “In the academic period 2020 to 2022, twenty-nine (29) different students successfully went through the Inner and Public Life of SCC courses. The courses were taught within four semesters:
  1. 2020 Inner Life = 17 students
  2. 2021 Public Life = 22 students
  3. 2022 Inner Life = 9 students
  4. 2022 Public Life = 1 student

The 29 students were from Ethiopia (1), (Ireland (1), USA (2), Nigeria (3), Tanzania (3), Uganda (6), and Kenya (13). The 29 students were distributed as follows: sisters (3), laymen (7), laywomen, (8), and priests (11).

- Our most recent connection in **2023** between LIM and AMECEA is our common interest in Young Adult Ministry. See the book *God's Quad: Small Faith Communities on Campus and Beyond* edited by Kevin Ahern and Christopher Derige Malano and published by Orbis Books in **2018**. This book has had a resurgence in the last year. It contains articles by Alloys Nyakundi (“We Create the Path by Walking: Youth Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa”) and Joseph Healey (“What Catholic Young People Really Want to Talk About”).

One of our LIM -- AMECEA common interests is to encourage more participation of Catholic Young Adults in the “**2021 – 2024 Synodal Process**.” This was my favorite topic when I met with Tracey and Tom yesterday. At a Press Conference in Rome on Friday, 20 April, 2023 Sister Nathalie Becquart presented the “Report of the Synodal Continental Task Force” and emphasized “that the strong experience of Small Christian Communities/Base Ecclesial Communities in Asia, Africa and Oceania is an experience of synodality.” One new SCC Pastoral Ecclesial Model is the Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community (Kenyatta University) coordinated by Alloys Nyakundi. It was formed to help young people develop a personal relationship with one another, grow their relationship with the Lord, network young people through Small Christian Communities, support the marginalized in our local communities and help young people develop a sense of pride. It is connected to our twice monthly Zoom Gatherings. See the [Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community](#) (Kenyatta University) Facebook Page.

As we move forward we are challenged to become a Synodal Church with a synodal mentality, attitude and vocabulary. Let us follow the Spanish proverb *let us create the path by walking*.

**NOTE:** This talk was part of a SCCs Zoom Gathering on 11 May, 2023.

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