

Advanced Missionary Discipleship Formation Program (AMDFP)
 Maryknoll Society House
 Los Altos, California
 9 am to 10:15 am on Tuesday, 20 August, 2024

Deeper Listening to the Stories and Experiences of Young Adults in Kenya and in the USA in Evolving a Synodal Catholic Church

By Alloys Nyakundi and Joe Healey

NOTE: We are combining the “See” in the “See-Discern-Act”ⁱ Reflection Process and deeper listening in the Synodal Process as we walk together.

1. One minute of silence as we listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying to us today.
2. 20 minutes: Alloys: “The Stories and Experiences of Young Adults in Kenya Today.”

a. Introduction:

- Start with the description of Young People Small Christian Communities (YPSCCs).
- Young People – referring to young people in high school, colleges, universities and those who have just graduated.
- Chapter 7 of the book *God’s Quad: “We Create the Path by Walking: Youth/Young People Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa”*: Activities of Young People in their YPSCCs:
 - Charity work – visiting children’s homes, prisoners, street children, physically challenged, sick in hospitals.
 - Participation in Mass.
 - Fun day and end of semester bash.
 - Visiting and helping other Young People.
- Conversations that take place in the YPSCCs reveal the challenges young people address in their YPSCCs. Examples.
- Online Young Adult SCCs.
- Online Young Adult Seekers Small Christian Community Facebook Page (Public Group): [Online Youn Adult Seekers Small Christian Communities | Facebook](#)

b. Challenges Facing Young Adults in Kenya:

- Drugs and substance abuse.
- High rate of unemployment.
- Intergenerational conflict.

- Sexuality, employment opportunities, sports and leisure, justice and peace issues, social media, and popular culture.
- Early pregnancies.
- Hopelessness.
- For many the Catholic Church in Africa is, quite simply, the *Magisterium* who are out of touch with many lay people especially Young People
- Some Young People feel alienated – specifically the LGBTQ communities.

c. Laws About Same-sex Sexual Activity in Kenya:

Same sex marriage is banned under the Kenyan Constitution since 2010. Expressions of homosexuality are illegal under Kenyan Statutes and carry a maximum penalty of 14 years imprisonment, or 21 years under certain aggravating circumstances. Sex acts between women are mentioned under the gender-neutral term "person" in Section 162 of the Penal Code and are enforced equally. On 28 November 2010, Prime Minister Raila Odinga rallied for women or men engaging in same-sex activity to be arrested.

The Kenyan Penal Code of 1930, as revised in 2006, provides as follows:

Section 162. Unnatural offenses. Any person who

(a) has carnal knowledge of any person against the order of nature; or

(b) permits a male person to have carnal knowledge of him or her against the order of nature, is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for 14 years: Provided that, in the case of an offence under paragraph (a), the offender shall be liable to imprisonment for 21 years if:

(i) the offence was committed without the consent of the person who was carnally known; or

(ii) the offence was committed with that person's consent but the consent was obtained by force or by means of threats or intimidation of some kind, or by fear of bodily harm, or by means of false representations as to the nature of the act.

d. Gen Z Protest in Kenya and the Power of the Social Media:

The month of June, 2024 saw protests erupt across Kenya. Initially focused on the rejection of the country's 2024 Finance Bill attention has since shifted to President Ruto's removal, police brutality, corruption, and politicians' broken promises and lifestyles. Nevertheless, the protests that Kenyans have witnessed during that month are different in important ways.

The scale of protest on Tuesday, 25 June 2024 – when MPs voted to support the widely unpopular Finance Bill – was unprecedented. Protestors came out across the country including in places that rarely witness demonstrations such as Lamu and Lodwar and in the President's hometown. Protestors breached Parliament and for the first time since the attempted 1982 Air Force *coup* the government deployed the military on the streets of Nairobi.

Since 25 June the protests have reduced in size and geographic spread. However, regular countrywide protests are still ongoing with protests of national issues paralleled by more local-level protests that focus on the broken promises and alleged corruption of county-level politicians. Unusually, the protests have also been more intense in the Rift Valley and in Central Kenya, which predominately supported Ruto in the 2022 elections than in Nyanza – a long-time opposition stronghold. Protestors have also been quick to diversify their tactics including a concert on 7 July 2024 to commemorate those killed during the demonstrations. 7 July was also the day in 1990 when nation-wide protests called for multi-party elections. The demonstrators also created a website tracking the government’s paltry progress on its promises.

Unprecedented in scale, protestors also won an almost immediate victory. Thus while President Ruto came out on the evening of the 25 June to remonstrate protestors as criminals and treasonous, in the face of growing calls for Kenyans to occupy State House and remove Ruto, the President opted to deescalate the situation on the 26 June by announcing the withdrawal of the Finance Bill, austerity by the executive arm, and a new focus on tackling corruption. Most importantly in the face of the Finance Bill’s withdrawal, movement members began to debate a hashtag shift from #RejectFinanceBill2024 to #Rutomustgo. Would Ruto’s ejection do more to destabilize than save the country? Who or what would replace Ruto? Should people give the government time to see if they come good with their promises? Is the aim to bring down Ruto or bring about reforms?

Cases of police brutality are now filmed and shared online fueling popular anger and providing a focus for more recent protests. Such citizen journalism may also make police officers more reluctant to use displays of force as they see the identity of their peers and their families being harmed. Finally, but not least, the protests have changed people’s political calculations. Kenyans and close observers are now acutely aware of the power that citizens can wield. They can – if they want – potentially bring down a government.

Politicians should similarly be aware that loyalty to the government without any consideration to public opinion can result in their properties being destroyed and persons being attacked. A failure to represent their constituents can also mobilize efforts for politicians to be recalled – a step that fortunately for MPs there is currently no legal process given that the country’s electoral commission is not properly constituted – and ultimately make it highly unlikely that they will be re-elected in 2027.

e. Act.

If you want to improve your relationship with Young People so that you can build positive relationships, then keep in mind the following truths:

1. Young people are insecure – give them confidence.
2. Young people want to feel special – sincerely compliment them.
3. Young people desire a better tomorrow – show them hope.
4. Young people need to be understood – listen to them.
5. Young people are selfish – speak to their needs first.
6. Young people get emotionally low – encourage them.

7. Young people want to be associated with success – help them win.
 8. Offer a sacred space where young people in their peer groups can meet and share their needs, experiences and life issues such as sex (romantic relationships), social media use, gambling, and unemployment.
3. 20 minutes: Joe Healey: “Ongoing Research on Young Adults in Kenya and the USA.”
 - a. Demonstration: “What is African Community.” With thanks to the First Grade at the Montessori School in Nairobi, Kenya.
 - b. Chapter 2 of the book *God’s Quad*: “What Catholic Young People Really Want to Talk About.” SCC Poll on the [Small Christian Communities Website](#).
 - c. Stories and Experiences of “Failures” (18 year old teenager in New Jersey, USA; sister of a young woman voting delegate at the Synod from Asia).
 - d. Stories and Experiences of “Successes” (Michigan State University, Michigan, USA student; Santa Clara University, California, USA student).
 - e. New learnings. Where do you find Catholic Young Adults on Sunday morning? A survey in Nairobi, Kenya showed that they are not in a Catholic Church but on social media. A new survey in the USA showed that rather than participating in mass on Sunday some Young Adults in the USA are involved in Yoga Sessions across the country; Spiritual Dancing (San Jose, California); Ecstatic Dancing and Tantric Dancing (Austen, Texas); etc.
 - f. Two takeaways:
 - i. How can we listen more deeply to Young Adults? We need to be flexible, adaptable and open. This is my friend Danny the Dinosaur. **[Hold up a rubber dinosaur]**. He did not respond to “the signs of the times.” He didn’t adapt. He did not change. Look where he is now.
 - ii. African Proverb on Community: *If you want to walk fast, walk alone. If you want to walk far, walk together.* Agaw (Eritrea and Ethiopia) Proverb and Burkina Faso Proverb.

Spanish proverb on developing the Small Christian Community Model of Church: *We create the path by walking*
4. 20 minutes: “Comments and Questions and Answers.”
 5. 15 minutes: “What are Our Learnings. Initial Application to the USA and The Way Forward.”

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ⁱ One of the main learnings of the worldwide 2021-2024 Synodal Process is that “one size does not fit all” and “the local context is very important, even essential.” Some examples:

- a. We used to say that “the local context is King” and later “the local context is King and Queen.” But these are not synodal words, they are power words, hierarchical words.
- b. “Discern” or “judge” as the second step of the Pastoral Theological Reflection Process. Depends on where you are.
- c. Different meanings of Youth/Young People/Young Adults/Young Professionals. The age range varies where you are living.
- d. Different responses in different continents to **LGBTQ+**.
- e. Different forms of the Deaconate.