

Paterson Diocese Helps Kenyan Small Christian Community Members to Celebrate Golden Jubilee

By Joseph G. Healey

Over 50,000 pilgrims gathered at the Marian Shrine in Subukia, Kenya in East Africa for the annual National Prayer Day on Saturday, 5 October, 2024. They celebrated the Closing of the Golden Jubilee (1973 to 2023) of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa.



As the pilgrims sat on grassy slopes, one was reminded of the Gospel scene of "Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand."

Catholics in Paterson Diocese in New Jersey in USA, especially members of Christ the King Parish, helped the SCC members in Kenya in the following ways:

1. Provided bus transportation from Nairobi to Subukia and back and breakfast and lunch for 35 committed SCC members.
 - a. 18 from five SCCs at Kenyatta University (KU) in Nairobi, Kenya. At the celebration St. Dominic SCC won an award that included gifts of a *Bible*, the *SCCs Handbook* and a commemorative candle.

- b. 17 from parish SCCs including eight members of St. Kizito SCC in the Waruku Section of St Austin's Parish in Nairobi, Kenya (four women, two men and two children). In the African tradition children are an essential part of SCCs.



Group photograph of SCCs pilgrims.

2. Sponsored a Catholic journalist/photographer Francis Njuguna.
3. Expenses of the coordinator Alloys Nyakundi.

Bishop Charles Kasonde, the Chairperson of AMECEA, presided at the Eucharistic Liturgy. The concelebrants included representatives from the AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa) Region: Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. The mass was well animated by Catholics of the of Mombasa Archdiocese Metropolitan. After communion the congregation sang *Asante Yesu* (Swahili for "Thank you, Jesus") that is a tradition in African masses. After the mass a priest carrying a monstrance containing a consecrated host processed through the crowd who knelt on the ground for Eucharistic Adoration.

At Subukia the SCC members from KU were commissioned by the AMECEA Office to sell books on SCCs. They sold over 100 copies in English and Swahili of the 80-page book *Strengthening the Growth of Small Christian Communities in Africa -- A Training Handbook for Facilitators*.



KU Students selling SCCs books.

Presently there are 195,000 SCCs in Eastern Africa as “the Church in the Neighborhood.” One example of harvesting the memories. In his introduction before mass, Archbishop Maurice Muhatia quoted from Number 89, the section on SCCs under "Living (or Vital) Christian Communities" in St. John Paul II's *Apostolic Exhortation* on the First African Synod (1994) -- *The Church in Africa*:

Right from the beginning, the Synod Fathers recognized that the Church as Family cannot reach her full potential as the Catholic 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 that 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. Above all, these communities are to be committed to living Christ's love for everybody, a love that transcends the limits of natural solidarity of clans, tribes (ethnic groups) or other interest groups.

He said that already 20 years before this 1994 African Synod AMECEA was promoting SCCs.

From my computer at my brother's home in New Vernon, New Jersey, USA I watched the celebration live on Capuchin TV for four hours. The number of 1,005 people watching live at 9:30 am went to 2,418 people watching live at 12:30 pm. Both English and Swahili commentators were excellent and explained AMECEA and SCCs well. The translation for the deaf was meaningful.

As the bus was returning to Nairobi on Sunday evening the SCC members called me on What'sApp Video. I had a nice conversation with the leaders – women and men – about the celebration. This is a good example of the importance of digital evangelization that is being discussed and discerned at the Synod in the Vatican this month.

Mary Wahome, one of leaders of St. Dominic SCC at KU, wrote on our Online Young Seekers SCC Facebook Page: "To our sponsors we are grateful for everything. God bless. God bless us all of us as we continue to journey together in solidarity as a Family of God."

From Archbishop Martin Kivuva Musonde in Rome: "So happy that all went well with the celebrations. We did highlight the "SCCs Celebrations" on the floor of the Synod on Synodality in the Vatican. Best wishes to you all. Great indeed it was. Be blessed."

We can be thankful for our 50 year SCCs history. As Bishop Charles Kasonde said so well: "Now on to the next 50 years." May the Holy Spirit guide us.

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