

TANGAZA COLLEGE
THE CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN AFRICA

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**SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES AS EXPRESSION
OF COMMUNION**
**A Case Study at St. Bhakita Catholic Church in Mukuru,
Nairobi**

Supervisor
Rev. Sr. Patricia Lanigan, M.M.M

A Long Essay Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies

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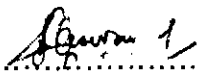
DEDICATION

This little humble piece of work is dedicated to all the Missionaries working in different countries over the world and in a special way the Spiritan Missionaries who are busy with starting and developing SCCs.

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned student, declare that this is my own original work, achieved through personal reading, critical reflection and scientific academic research. It is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies. It has not been submitted for academic credit to any other college or university.

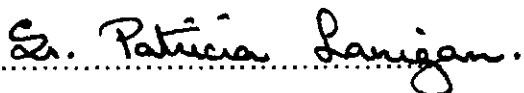
All sources have been cited in full and acknowledged.

Signed 

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This long essay has been submitted for examination with my approval as the college Supervisor.

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May the good Lord bless you all. *Aksanteni Sana.*

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In the Catholic Church, we emphasise the idea that our Christian community is to have all the valuable elements of a human community. This is due to the fact that our Christian community is simply a human community transformed by the Holy Spirit. In this community mutual trust and affection has to exist among the members. The guiding principle of such community has to be grounded on the word of God, Eucharistic celebration and it should be apostolic, making sure that there is a truly sharing and caring spirit among the members.

SCCs are the Church at the grassroots. O' Halloran says "The small community is a living cell within the Church; a small-scale group with human warmth; a group in which the Gospel can be lived totally; a nucleus that projects itself into the wider community be it parish or diocese."¹ They make the Christians live their Christian faith in a more profound way, making sure that what the Church teaches is well lived. SCCs lead to the involvement of every member in the common task and mission of the Church. In fact they affect the structure of the Church life as "they engage parishioners in the personal relationships needed for mutual support, faith reflection, and participation in the mission of Christ."²

¹ J. O'HALLORAN, *Living Cells*, 11.

² http://www.nplc.org/small_communities.htm

The members of such a community come from a given geographical area. Every member of the Church is called to participate in these communities. Hence, these communities represent the members of the Church in each area and can take decisions in their name, and their leaders can constitute the Parish Council. Through the SCCs, 'Immanuel' that means God is with us is really experienced and lived. It is in SCCs that Christians live the sacraments in a more practical way. Besides that it is in the SCCs that the Christians experience the Church as a new way of being together, communion with each other.

When I started participating in the SCCs during my short pastoral at Masii Parish in Machakos, Kenya, and later in Tanzania at Usa River Parish and Mkuu Parish, I witnessed all what I have stated above. The members of the SCCs in their respective areas were sharing the Bible according to their own understanding. They were applying the gospel in their daily lives. They were praying together with confidence, and breaking bread together in the Eucharistic celebration. They were ready to attend to the needs of anybody who has a problem and sometimes they were able to say no to different injustices in their society. They were living closely just as the early Christian communities lived according to the Acts of the Apostles. These aspects motivated me to choose this topic for my long essay that I may research on the way SCCs bring people more closely to one another in order to have a good Christian community. I will use St. Bhakita Catholic Church in Mukuru, Nairobi, as a reference, trying to show how the SCCs bring people more closely to one another.

In the SCCs of St. Bhakita Catholic Church, we realize that among the services in which they involve themselves, each of them contributes in the building

of communion in the Church. Communion put people in the position of sharing the life of God among themselves. This is the communion, which is rooted in the life we share with Christ by the virtue of Baptism. Due to the presence of the Spirit in us, we have the love of God in us. We are called to share this love to others, something that leads to communion among us. Moreover, in a community centered on the love of God, it opens a room for dialogue and mutual trust and understanding among the family of God-the Church.

The main objective of this paper is to reflect on the idea of communion in our Church today. All the faithful are called to be in communion with God and one another in building up the Kingdom of God. For a missionary in the world today should be aware that SCCs are a way of living the communion of the Church fully. As we are now in 21st century, we should be aware that since 1973 in Africa, SCCs have played a significant role in development and in proclaiming the gospel of love. They have enabled believers to develop a more profound union with God and with one another.

This work is divided into four Chapters. In chapter one we shall have an overview on the SCCs in East Africa. This will include the definition of the SCCs, and the understanding of SCCs in the New Testament. Then we shall have a historical background of the SCCs and the difficulties encountered by SCCs in East Africa. I will also point the comparison between the SCCs in Africa and in Latin America. This will be followed by the purpose of SCCs in our Church today.

Chapter two will deal with communion in the Church. We are aware that SCC are a way of incarnating the Church, the way of making Christ more

manifested among his people, the grass roots of the Church. Hence, the communion lived in the whole Church should be made real in the SCCs. We shall start by defining the term Communion, which will be followed by an explanation of the communion of the Baptised. Here we shall see the participation of the faithful in building the Kingdom of God from the doctrinal basis. Besides this, we shall explore the participation of the Laity in our Church today. It will involve an explanation about the position of the lay people in making sure that communion is manifested and lived in the Church. We shall also see the source of unity in the Church.

Chapter three is on how SCCs bring communion among the Parishioners of St. Bhakita Catholic Church in Mukuru, Nairobi. We shall look at St. Bhakita Catholic Church, its location and the economic activities of the people. We shall have an overview on SCCs from this Parish that which will include a general understanding of SCCs according to the faithful of this centre. Then we shall examine the elements that express communion in the communities. Since any organization cannot exist without some drawbacks, challenges, we shall have a section on the challenges facing SCCs at St. Bhakita Church. At the end of this chapter we shall make a comparison of SCCs of St. Bhakita Church and my personal experience on SCCs in Tanzania.

The last chapter will be about practical suggestions. It is a chapter, which gives some possible steps to be taken in order to have a well-established SCCs. Lastly; we shall have evaluation and conclusion of this essay, which will be followed by the questionnaire used in the collection of necessary material for compiling this work.

CHAPTER 1: SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN EAST AFRICA

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I will discuss about the SCCs in East Africa with an emphasis on Kenya. It includes the meaning of SCCs, SCCs in the New Testament, a historical background of SCCs, the difficulties encountered by the SCCs in East Africa, and the purpose of SCCs. Then I will give conclusion.

1.2 WHAT ARE THE SCCS

Small Christian Communities are composed of Christian families, which are geographically and demographically close and spiritually intimate. They “are means by which the Church is brought down to the daily life and concerns of people, to where they actually live. In them, the Church takes on flesh and blood in the life situation of people.”³ It is through the SCCs that the one Church is present in each locality touching the whole life of its members. We realize that, the SCCs make sure that the faithful are able to recognize the mystery of Christ among themselves that is the ‘Emmanuel’. It is in the SCCs that the faithful can truly experience the Church as a new way of being together. They can experience the real love communicated in the Church; and it is in them that they are saved in hope.

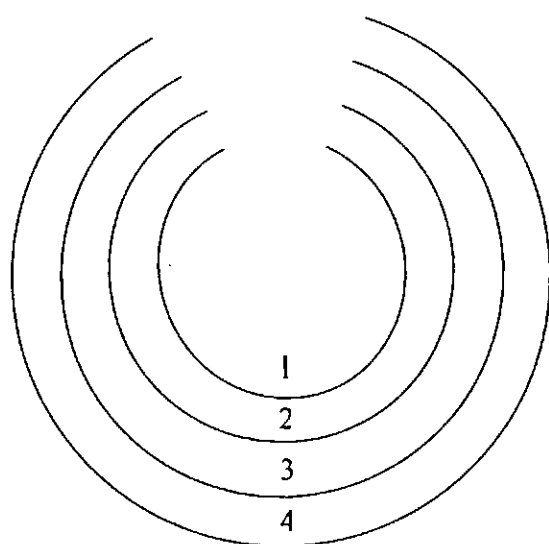
SCCs make up the foundational or basic local Church with self-ministering and self-supporting as a Church at grass roots. Besides that in communion with the other SCCs in the Parish, Diocese, country etc, they unite all the faithful together to

³ Conclusions of the AMECEA Study Conference 1979, 266.

constitute the parochial, diocesan, and the universal Church. "These communities, we are told further, must work with the hierarchy and be inserted into the larger community, both parochial and diocesan."⁴ Hence there is a good relationship between the SCCs and the universal Church and the world community.

In the diagram below we notice that community prevails from the small circle of the Church to the big one. It is a diagram based on concentric circles as James O'Halloran uses it. He says, "I have purposely left all the circles open, because a Christian community of its very nature must be open to all other communities: either it inter-relates and interacts with them or it ceases to be Christian"⁵

Diagram:



Key:

1 = Small Christian Community
(communion of families)

2 = Parish (Communion of
Communities)

3 = Diocese (Communion
of Parishes)

4 = Universal Church
(Communion of Diocese)

The members of a SCC relate deeply to one another, giving witness in their unity to the harmony of the Trinity, being in fact the Body of Christ. This

⁴ C. MWOLEKA, "Small Christian Communities", 20.

⁵ J. O'HALLORAN, *Living Cells*, 26.

communion should be seen in the Eucharist, word of God, prayer, reconciliation and reflection. It is true that we cannot know all the Christians of our Parishes, but we can know our neighbours so that we can fulfill the words of the Holy Scripture. "Love your neighbour ..." (Mt. 5:43). SCCs help us to practice this love towards our immediate neighbours before we reach out to the rest of Christians.⁶

The members of a SCC believe in Christ and are committed to Christ and are looking forward to share all aspects of their lives, "for instance faith, commitment, worship, ideas, intuitions, friendship, material possessions, and good works".⁷ It is emphasized that this sharing should be holistic; that is spiritual, intellectual, intuitive, emotional and practical. It is in such a small community that the communion of Christians can be visibly practiced. Such SCC is the place where the presence of Christ can be perceived as uniting all Christians and witnessed with some guarantee of continuity and persistence.⁸ SCCs should represent the various generations from old to young, and to reflect in micro-cosmos the mystery of the Church in which we say "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slaves nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ." (Gal. 3:28)

To conclude, we have to be aware that SCCs are not composed of members who, like religious, live under the same roof. In steady they are made up of people who live in their own houses but gather together in a home or some other appropriate place for prayers and other activities, which make a community.

⁶ R. MEJIA, *The Church in the Neighborhood*, 29.

⁷ J. O'HALLORAN, *Small Christian Communities*, 44.

⁸ C. MWOLEKA, "Small Christian Communities", 20.

1.3 SCCS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

After Pentecost, the disciples formed communities and shared the Eucharist at homes in small groups, but they were not called churches. Therefore, in Acts 12:12, we read of their being gathered in the house of John and Mark. In Romans 16:5 Paul sends greetings to the group that meets in the House of Priscilla and Aquila (Cf. also Roman. 16:11 and 16: 14-15). A significant fact emerges here: Christians met in homes and it was there that they got the experience of the intimate group.⁹ We can say that it was a household structured Church which provided the basis structure of the early Christian communities.

The Acts of Apostles shows us the way the early Christian community lived. The important passages are: Acts 2:41-47 and Acts 4:32-37. In Acts 2:41-47 we read,

So those who received his word were baptized ...and they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers... And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as they had need.

All the common elements of SCCs are founded in these two passages. We have realized that the Jerusalem community from the very beginning belonged to common faith and salvation. This early community is presented as an ideal community. It is centered on brotherhood and fraternal sharing in all the proceeding among the members. Everybody in this community was called to participate in the life of the community. No-body could live in isolation since they were in one community centered on Jesus and in particular the apostles who were witnesses to the deeds and works of Jesus Christ.

⁹ J. O' HALLORAN, *Small Christian Communities*, 196.

This community of Jerusalem grew bigger and bigger (Cf. Acts 6:7) making sure that everybody was participating in the activities of the community and no-body could feel greater than the other. They faced problems and tensions, but tackling them together in faith, in a way which increased group cohesion. Their main work was to make sure that they remained witnesses to Jesus and to the rest of the nations (Cf. Acts 1:8). Thus Vatican II Council, looking back at the early Church says, "The Church of Christ is found in every group of faithful in a certain neighborhood or area, who together with their pastors are called the Church in the writings of the New Testament. (See the Church in the Modern World, LG 26)"¹⁰

1.4 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF SCCS IN EAST AFRICA

According to Rev. Fr. Augustine Mringi, there are some documents that give a basis and support for establishment of the SCCs in East Africa. Among them is the Vatican II Council, the centenary publications of the Catholic Church in Tanzania in 1968, the study year organized by the TEC in 1969, Pope Paul VI's visit to Uganda in 1969, the AMECEA 1973 Plenary Conference, the 1974, 1977 Synod of Bishops and other AMECEA meetings in 1976, 1977, and 1979¹¹

It was in the AMECEA plenary conference of 1973 when the Bishops of East Africa started thinking of starting SCCs. However, the real beginning of SCCs in East Africa followed the AMECEA Study Session of 1976. Besides that we are told that there were some other initiatives before AMECEA. The first initiative in Eastern Africa can be traced back to Nyamboro Parish in Musoma Diocese, in

¹⁰ R. MEJIA, *The Church in the Neighborhood*, 18-19.

¹¹ D. M. NGONA, *Small Christian Communities*, 11.

Tanzania in 1966¹² Three years later, there was a seminar study year in Tanzania in which the local Church communities were considered to be a priority for spreading the Good News of Jesus. In 1973, Bishop Patrick Kililombe promoted a diocesan plan at grass roots level. He was the first Bishop of Eastern Africa to carry out such an enterprise at diocesan level and he is credited with the growth of the SCCs in AMECEA countries. In 1974, Bishop Mwoleka of Rulenge Diocese in Tanzania and the Tanzanian Council of the laity developed a step-by-step plan for starting SCCs throughout Tanzania.

In the year 1976, there was a task made by the AMECEA meeting on building SCCs as a means of renewing the Church in Eastern Africa. This task was accepted as a Pastoral priority for respective areas. In 1979, the AMECEA Plenary conference that was held in Zomba-Malawi re-affirmed the Bishop's commitment to the building up of SCCs in Eastern Africa. It was seen very clearly that SCCs would be the most effective means of making the gospel message truly relevant to African cultures and traditions. This is by participating in the life of the Church at this most local level whereby Christians will foster the gradual and steady maturing of the young infant Churches. It was agreed that we need SCCs as a way of incarnating the Church in the lives of people. It is called "the most local incarnations of the Church of Christ."¹³

In 1980 there was an increasing awareness of the importance of SCCs as a pastoral priority in Eastern Africa and more effort was put into their implementation. However, some obstacles appeared like lack of training of clergy, religious and the

¹² J. HEALEY., "Basic Christian Communities", 225.

¹³ Amecea Plenary Study Conference 1997, 264.

laity, lack of proper orientation and mis-understanding of the goal of SCCs¹⁴, which is shown in the simple evaluation made by Fr. Healey on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the promulgation of SCCs in Eastern Africa. In some other places the formation of SCCs was so clerically centered that the Laity remained subject to the Clergy. Therefore, there was the need to underline the renewed concept of Church brought about by Vatican II Council and by the later documents of the Church. In 1992, the AMECEA Plenary conference held in Lusaka Zambia re-emphasized the pastoral commitment of SCCs. It was emphasized that SCCs are not optional in our Churches. They are central to the life of faith and the ministry of evangelization. In 1997, it was agreed by AMECEA that “the model of Small Christian Community should be used in every diocese.”¹⁵

In 1999, following up the African Synod of 1995, AMECEA plenary Conference reflected on the formation of agents of Evangelization for the Church as Family in order to assess the implementation of the new understanding of being Church that is Church as a Family and of fostering the SCCs as a pastoral priority. Up to now SCCs are growing very fast and they are still a pastoral priority of the Local Church.

In Kenya we realize that between 1960 and 1970, Christianity was growing in a very fast way and lay participation was a reality in some dioceses especially in Nairobi, Kisumu and Nyeri.¹⁶ This came as a result of Vatican II Council, which promoted a more active lay participation in the whole life of the Church. This

¹⁴ There was not much emphasis on actions. Much effort was put on prayers and Bible sharing. People failed also to differentiate between SCCs and Outstations

¹⁵ <http://www.catholicnews.com/data/briefs/cns/20040624.htm>

¹⁶ J. BAUR, *Catholic Church in Kenya*, 192.

Council emphasized that the Church is not so much the Hierarchy but rather it is the whole people of God to be involved in the building of the Church. In this way, Bishops share with the Pope responsibility for the universal Church and the Priest share responsibility with the Bishops for the diocese, hence the faithful share with the Priests the responsibility for the Parish.¹⁷

In Kenya, most of the dioceses made serious attempt to build up SCCs. The founding of these communities took a long time and it was not an easy work because of the difficulties, which were there. However, in those places where people had a strong faith and were motivated to come together, a great success could be seen. It is proved that many Churches formed stronger Church communities at local level. In 1979, a program to establish effective ecclesial communities started in Kisumu with the encouragement of the Bishop.

Following the AMECEA Plenary meetings in 1973, 1976, 1979, the late Bishop Gatimu of Nyeri Diocese was quick to follow up the idea of creating self-reliant Christian communities. He introduced a year of self-study and spiritual renewal for his diocese. This was very successful. "Since 1980, the formation of SCCs in the diocese was accepted as a top priority. A step towards this goal through training of leaders ... was continued throughout 1981."¹⁸ Some workshops were conducted and spread over the year. The Parish team includes priests, religious and laity and all the programs done were facilitated by diocesan staff with some outside

¹⁷ This idea comes from *Lumen Gentium* Chapter Two. However, *Lumen Gentium* Chapter Three talks of the Church as hierarchical something that brings tension between the two chapters.

¹⁸ B. KIRISWA, "Small Christian Communities", 92.

help. There was a great success in the diocese and up to 1982, Matunda Parish had 62 communities.

A new diocese of Muranga was created in 1983, and Rt. Rev. Peter Kairo was appointed the Bishop of this diocese. He sought a greater participation and promotion of SCCs. The maturing of the Kenyan Church was also an important factor in the spreading of SCCs with creation of new dioceses as we have seen above. Efforts were made to make people aware of their cultural heritage, their actual life situations, their needs and resources. They inspired them to take active responsibility for transforming their society resulted in co-coordinated action rooted in the SCCs. We notice that, following the planning for the 1980's by AMECEA Bishops in most of the dioceses of Kenya, "serious attempts were made to build up these communities"¹⁹

1.5 DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY SCCS IN EAST AFRICA

I noticed that in many Parishes the majority of the SCCs found it difficult to keep up weekly meetings. The members failed to maintain the rhythm of the regular meetings of the SCCs throughout the year. This leads to poor attendance at meetings. The issue here is that people were not ready to devote their time more than once for the Church meetings weekly.

Another difficulty is that there was lack of suitable training materials. People did not get good materials to help them know about the SCCs the way we have them now. Also by that time very few people were educated. This led to lack of good leadership.

¹⁹ H. BURGMAN, *The Way the Catholic Church*", 305.

It was discovered that the number of women in the SCCs was more than that of men. There was also a division, which was caused by tribalism, culture and language. Due to this factor, many people could not join certain SCCs because such SCCs were not made by members of their tribe or those members do not speak their local language.

There was also a belief in superstition, witchcraft that hindered many people to join SCCs fearing that they could be witched by the rest of the members. Another problem was that some SCCs were not dealing with Social Justice in the Community. They forgot that dealing with Social Justice is one of the purposes of SCCs. We also realize that people did not know that dealing with simple services like visiting the sick, participating in burial services and visiting the old was one of the purposes of SCCs.

Generally we can say that the SCCs failed to take root because they were imposed 'from above'. It was the Bishops of AMECEA who saw the need of starting SCCs.

1.6 COMPARISON BETWEEN THE SCCS IN EAST AFRICA AND LATIN AMERICA

In East Africa we use the words "Small Christian Community" instead of "Basic Christian Communities" or "Basic Ecclesial Communities" as is used in Latin America. The AMECEA Bishops decided to use the term 'small' because it signifies what they exactly meant, that is people live out their Christian commitment in small communities.

We notice that the SCCs in East Africa were started “from above” while in Latin America BCCs emerged from below.”²⁰ In East Africa the AMECEA Bishops saw the need of establishing SCCs, but in Latin America, it is the Christians who felt that the Church and social structures did not meet their needs.

SCCs in East Africa evolved in the context of pastoral planning but in Latin America, BCCs or BECs emerged in the struggle for liberation. Besides that in East Africa, Bible sharing is throughout the year while in Latin America, Bible sharing is done only during the main seasons, mainly in Lent and Advent. It is done in the groups called Bible circles.

In East Africa, community meeting rotates between homes of the members during the weekdays. On Sunday’s all the SCCs conduct their Sunday worship in the Church. In Latin America, each community has its own Chapel, whereby every Sunday the worship is conducted in this room.

Despite of these differences, both of them are a creative effort of the third world Churches to build a new type of Church starting from the grassroots. Also the praxis model of prayer, reflection and action has produced a flowering of lay ministries and a dynamic involvement in society.²¹

²⁰ F. LOBINGER, “Christian Base Communities” 152.

²¹ J. HEALEY, “Basic Christian Community” 232.

1.7 THE PURPOSE OF THE SCCS

When the AMECEA Bishops started the SCCs, they had a purpose in their mind. One of the purposes of the SCCs is to bring Christian together for prayer, listening, bible sharing, reflections and mediations, thus deepening and renewing Christian faith and commitment²², fraternal charity and sharing the Agape together²³

The second purpose is to strengthen attitude of self-reliance. This is one way of making the faithful contribute whatever they have making sure that the Church grows. It calls for the “role of stimulating, encouraging and strengthening the exercise of the many gifts of the Spirit in every Christian community.”²⁴ There is a need to care for the poor, the young, the aged, the sick and the handicapped. Here the SCCs are called to have a heart of caring, loving, forgiving that taking each other as a brother or sister. We have to make efforts in providing a ground whereby each member of the community offers himself as a joyful gift to others. That is to say everything one does has to be for the sake of others, making sure that we are truly one Body.

SCCs are to make sure that members are aware of social injustices in their areas and help them to learn how to tackle these as a group. We have a lot of injustice in our society today. For instance child labor, underpaid workers and the rest. There is a need for the Church to foster the political and social consciousness of the Christian community. The Church is called to take responsibility as the

²² Commitment signifies total giving of the self to Christ, which the members undertake. SCC members make a basic commitment to nurture faithfully a deeper relationship with God. The basic commitment of being faithful to the Spirit of God in our lives is expressed in our personal relationship to God, a relationship with one another, and a relationship with the larger community (the world)

²³ PAUL VI, *EN*, 58.

²⁴ Conclusions of the AMECEA Study Conference 1979, 311.

conscience of society more seriously. Commissions for Justice and Peace should be actively engaged in the search for social Justice at all levels, that is to say local community, parish, diocesan, national and international.

The mission we receive from our Baptism has to be generated and propagated fully to the people around. We are called to communicate the Good News to others, and go out to others in service as true disciples of Christ. In doing this we have to be very active making sure that this goal is reached.

The members of SCCs are to share their joys and grief, and bring people to reconciliation between individuals and groups. "An essential aspect of a Christian community is that it be a real sign of peace and reconciliation."²⁵ Reconciliation is to be brought between God and individuals and between individual themselves. On the other level we need reconciliation between one community and another, something that calls for a dialogue between the required parties.

1:8 CONCLUSION

The AMECEA Plenary meetings of 1973, 1976 respectively, are the starting point of SCCs in East Africa. However, this reflection on the SCCs as presented by the Bishops of AMECEA has its basis in the New Testament. New Testament presents the early community of the Christians as a model of today's SCCs regardless of the differences. Today we don't share everything as the early Christian community did only because we are living in a different environment. Hence, due to the efforts invested in the animation of SCCs by the Bishops, Priests and the Laity we have SCCs in our Church, making sure that the Church of Kenya, for example, will be self-sustaining economically, pastorally and in its ministries.

²⁵ Conclusions of the AMECEA Study Conference 1979, 312.

CHAPTER 2: COMMUNION IN THE CHURCH

1. INTRODUCTION

SCCs are the Church itself in the neighborhood. Today on the practical grass root level, in the parishes, most SCCs are models that develop the Parish structures. This is based on the communion of the families in the same neighborhood or geographical area. The communion that I am talking about here is the communion of the communities, which involve all ‘people of God’ with all their natural factors.²⁶ ¶

Having this in mind let us discuss about the communion in the Church from which the SCCs derive.

2.2 WHAT IS COMMUNION

The term ‘communion’ has a number of different meanings. In the Christian context, communion is derived from a Latin word ‘*communio*’ that has two separate but closely related meanings that have passed into English. “The first designates the participation of the faithful in the Eucharist through the eating of the consecrated species. The second, which may be more aptly expressed by the word *fellowship*; refers to the community life in the mystical Body of Christ that is the effect of the Eucharist”.²⁷ Hence, in the definition of the term communion we can see two important words ‘sharing’ and ‘participation’. Participation signifies the role and work of each participant. Sharing signifies the idea of distributing properties or

²⁶ People of God: These are the people who have faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. (Cf. 1 Pet. 2:9) In the OT it refers to the Israel, the chosen nation. (Cf. Jer. 31:31-34) These people are to involve themselves in the communities without considering their color, race, nationality, and social and economic differences.

²⁷ L. BOUYER, “Communion” 1963.

items equally, and also giving a person time to express his or her feelings on an issue during a time of conversation.

2.3 THE COMMUNION OF THE BAPTIZED

We still have people who think that the Church is a building where Christians meet for prayers. However, the Church left behind by our Lord Jesus Christ is the community of Christians themselves and everyone of us is like a living stone of the spiritual building (Cf. 1 Pet. 2:5), and it is not a stone building.²⁸ St. Paul made it very clear that the Church is community of believers when he says, “What agreement has the Temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “ I will live in them and move among them, and I will be their God and they shall be my people.” (2 Cor. 6:16)

We learn that those who are baptized are the Church as they share the common Christian faith. “Incorporated into the Church by baptism, the faithful are appointed by their baptismal character as Christian religious worship; reborn as sons and daughters of God, they must profess before men and women the faith they have received from God through the Church.”²⁹ Paul tells us that “For by one Spirit we were baptized into one body-Jews or Greeks, ... all were made to drink of one Spirit.” (1 Cor. 12:13). This statement is confirmed in Rom. 6:3 “Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?” Therefore, “through baptism there is new life in Jesus Christ, regardless of

²⁸ R. MEJIA, *The Church in the Neighborhood*, 24.

²⁹ LG 11.

any distinction of culture, sex, social condition etc., because all form only one Body in Jesus Christ.”³⁰

We have several forms of the Church, but the Church is always one. We have the universal Church, which denotes all Christian Catholics in the world. We have also Parish Church that is made up by the Christians in the same Parish. We also have here another category of the Small Christian Communities, which make up the Parish Church. However, all of these categories do not break the unity of the Church that originated from Christ himself when he said “for where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Mt. 18:20)

The model of the Church as communion or as community founded on communion is that one that emanates most directly from the explicitly ecclesiology of Vat. II Council as expressed in *Lumen Gentium*.

Since the Church, in Christ, is in the nature of sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men—she here proposes, the benefit of the faithful and of the whole world, to set forth, as clearly as possible, and in the tradition laid down by earlier Councils, her own nature and universal mission.³¹

With Vatican II we realize that the Church is the community that is established in communion with God and among human beings. It makes sure that the people of God are embraced and brought together with all the multiplicity of their gifts, vocation, service and functions.

According to Yves Congar, we have the idea that the Church has two inseparable aspects. “On the one hand is it a fellowship of persons - a fellowship of men with God and with one another in Christ. On the other hand the Church is also

³⁰ G. KOCHOLICKAL, *The Church we Believe in*, 73.

³¹ LG 1

the totality of the means by which this fellowship is produced and maintained.”³² The first aspect means Church as a ‘community of salvation’ and the latter aspect refers to the Church as an ‘institution of salvation’. Hence, in its ultimate reality the Church is a fellowship of persons.

J. Harmer, a theologian adds on what Congar said by saying that the Church or the mystical body of Christ, is a communion which is at once inward and external, an inner communion of spiritual life (of faith, hope, and charity) signified and engendered by an external communion in the profession of the faith, discipline and the sacramental life.³³

We have to notice that Harmer does not mean that it is simply a community in the sociological sense. He distinguishes this notion of communion into two dimensions namely horizontal and vertical dimension.³⁴ Horizontal dimension is where communion is there in the sense of sociological groups that are a matter of friendly relationship between man and man. The vertical dimension is that divine life disclosed in the incarnate Christ and communicated to men through his Spirit.

In the reality of the Church there should be an outward or external and visible bonds of a brotherly/sisterly love, something that has to rest upon a deep spiritual communion of grace or charity. The communion given by the Holy Spirit should be seen in a network of mutual interpersonal relationships of concern and

³² A. DULLES, *Models of the Church*, 49.

³³ A. DULLES, *Models of the Church*, 49.

³⁴ This is well expressed in Pauline letters and Acts of Apostles. For instance in 1 Cor. 1:9 and 2 Cor. 13:14 talk of vertical dimension that is our union with God and Jesus Christ. In Acts 2:42 and 1 Cor. 10:16 we see horizontal dimension that is the unity of the Body of Christ.

assistance. The members should show the communion in the whole network of their life in the Church.

2.3.1 The Church as Body of Christ

We find that the image of the Body of Christ is 'organic' rather than 'sociological'³⁵. We use the analogy of human body that is equipped with several organs to explain the Church in relation to Jesus Christ. This idea of the Church as Body of Christ is found in Paul's Epistles. "We find his theme of the Church as the body of Christ in I Corinthians, Romans and also in Ephesians and Colossians; but only in two latter is it fully developed."³⁶ In I Cor. 10, Paul maintains that the Christians because of their baptism are living in communion with Christ. The communion with Christ is founded in the fact that the cup of blessings establishes a union in the blood of Christ and that the bread broken in the communal meal establishes a union with the body of Christ, that is, with the whole Christ. He says that because the bread is one, we all, though many, are one body. Paul calls the Eucharistic body of Jesus Christ the basis and the means of the body, which is the Church.

In I Cor. 12 Paul speaks of the gifts giving by the Holy Spirit. We have only one and the same Spirit who is the giver of the various gifts in the community. By the fact that he is one in himself, the various gifts given by him form a unity. Paul uses the image of the human body to demonstrate such unity. His idea is to present the union of believers in Christ in such a way that in place of expected word "spirit"

³⁵ When we talk of 'organic' in this context we mean a relationship based on a bodily organs network, while sociological means a friendly relationship between man/woman and man/woman (A. DULLES, *Modes of the Church*, 50.)

³⁶ M. SCHMAUS, *Dogma 4*, 54.

the word “Christ” can be inserted.³⁷ Hence, they form one body, not their own, but the body of Christ. (Cf. 1 Cor. 12:12). From Ephesians and Colossians we get another version of relationship, which is on the basis of head-Christ and body-Church. (Cf. Col. 1:18, Eph. 1:22).

Developing this idea of the Church as the Body of Christ, Augustine says it includes heavenly members, having the Holy Spirit as the soul of the body. Thomas Aquinas maintains “the Church is made up of all who are brought into union with God by supernatural grace flowing from Christ as head”³⁸ For Aquinas, the Holy Spirit is seen indirectly as the principal unity that dwells in Christ and in us, building together the faithful together with Christ and in Christ. The Vatican II-*Lumen Gentium* no. 8 reaffirms this.³⁹

2.3.2 The Church as People of God

Vatican II Council brought forward the idea of the Church as the pilgrim people of God⁴⁰. However, this concept is a “ biblical concept having deep roots in the Old Testament where Israel is constantly referred to as the nation of God’s special predilection.”⁴¹ That is why we read from Jeremiah that “... and they shall be my people ... for they shall know me from the least of them to the greatest says the Lord”. (Jer. 31:31-34) Moreover, in the New Testament we have several texts that talk of the Christian as the new Israel or as the people of God of the new

³⁷ M. SCHEMAUS, *Dogma 4*, 55.

³⁸ A. DULLES, *Models of the Church*, 51.

³⁹ It is clearly explained that the society structured with hierarchical organs and the Mystical Body of Christ, the visible society and the spiritual community, the earthly Church endowed with heavenly riches, are not to be thought of as two realities. On contrary they form only one reality that has human and divine elements.

⁴⁰ Pilgrim people of God mean that as Christians we are people ‘on the march’. We are on the journey towards perfection, which is in God.

⁴¹ A. DULLES, *Models of the Church*, 53.

covenant. For example, Heb 8:10 says, “This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; ...I will be their God, and they shall be my People.” In Pauline letters, we find the concept of the Church as the spiritual people of God most prominent in the letter to the Galatians and in 1 Corinthians; where it stands at the center of Paul’s ecclesiology.⁴²

Chapter two of the Vatican II on the Church, talk of God who chose the Israelites to be his own people and established a covenant with them. He gradually instructed these people making sure that they remain firm in the covenant, as a preparation of the new covenant that was to be ratified in Christ. “Christ instituted this new covenant, namely the new covenant in his blood (Cf. 1 Cor. 11:25); he called a race made up of Jews and Gentiles which would be one, not according to the flesh, but in the Spirit, and this race would be the new People of God.”⁴³ It is all about those who believe in Christ, those who are born again not from the flesh but from water and the Holy Spirit. These are the a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation ... who in times past were not a people, but now are the people of God in co-existence with the body of Christ. It is a visible and social unity.

2.3.3 Though Many in the Church Still we are One

Up to this point we see that the analogy of Body of Christ and people of God emphasizes the immediate relationship of all the believers to the Holy Spirit, who is the animator of the Church. We can comment that concepts focus attention likewise on the mutual service of the members towards one another and on the subordination of the particular good of any group to that of the whole Body or People. Here we

⁴² M. SCHMAUS, *Dogma 4*, 46.

⁴³ LG 9.

find that the two illuminate from different angles of the notion of the Church as communion or community. It is a point where the Church is seen as a communion of men/women, primarily interior but also expressed by external bonds of creed, worship and ecclesiastical fellowship. It is the Holy Spirit who makes us one regardless of being many in the Church.

The communion model of the Church has a better basis in the Biblical notion of communion (*Koinonia*) as found in the Pauline letters and Acts of Apostles. George Kumi divides this communion into two dimensions namely the vertical (communion with God), and the Horizontal (communion among people).⁴⁴ In Pauline letters communion is expressed as the most intimate union of people with God and one another accomplished through Christ. Paul talks of communion, *Koinonia* in Greek, usually translated as fellowship, that it has both present and future reality.⁴⁵

John focuses vertical dimension of *Koinonia* as fellowship of the brethren with Christ, leading to fellowship with the Father. (Cf. 1 Jn. 1:3-7) We also see the use of the word *Koinonia* in Luke's writing that explains the life of the first Christians. "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers." (Acts 2:42). Another aspect of communion can be seeing in Acts 1:14, 2:46, 4:32 that depicts the unity of heart and Spirit among the early Christian.

⁴⁴ G. K. KUMI, "Basic Ecclesial Communities", 161.

⁴⁵ Future reality for George Kumi means a complete fellowship with the Son, as it will be realized at the '*Parousia*'. The present reality means *Koinonia* in faith. (Cf. Phm. 6) *Koinonia* in the Eucharist. (Cf. 1 Cor. 10:16) *Koinonia* in collection. (Cf. 2 Cor. 8:4)

Paul also in his writings tries to show the communion between the Churches started by apostles. For him communion has two elements. The first element is that all Christians share the same faith in the same Gospel message. (Cf. Gal. 1:6-9) When some people wanted to pervert the gospel message, Paul claims that salvation depends entirely on faith in Christ and the redemption he accomplished by dying on the cross. There was a group of judaisers who had charged Paul as an 'outsider' after having a sympathetic hearing from Peter, John and James. They thought that there are several Churches for instance the one of Paul and Peter, John and James made others. Thus, Paul wanted to prove that his Church was in communion with the Churches founded by other apostles. He was convinced that without the same faith they could not be one Church. Therefore, one of the essences of communion is sharing the same faith in the same Gospel message.⁴⁶

The second important element of communion is the bond of love that showed concretely in the care for the poor. It is all about the fraternal love and sharing between the Churches. For Paul the most effective way of showing communion is caring for the poor of the other Churches and it is an effective symbol of sharing the same faith. In 2 Cor. 8-9, Paul organized the great collection, something he spoke of again in Rom. 15:25-27. Certainly the underlying motive was not only charity but also fellowship.

John in his gospel presents Jesus who prayed that there might be one flock and one shepherd. (Cf. Jn. 10:16) and that all his disciples might be one, as he and the Father are one (Cf. Jn. 17:21). Paul in his letters comments that since Christians know only one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, are all members of one another.

⁴⁶ G. KOCHOLICKAL, *The Church we Believe in*, 73.

Hence, our fellowship should be seen from the point of view that “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus ” (Gal. 3:28). All national and racial differences, all distinction of sex, age, and social class find themselves in the light of the transcendent unity of the faithful in Christ. For the Church to be divided, Paul implies, is as impossible as for Christ to be divided. (Cf. 1 Cor. 1:13)

2.4 THE SOURCE OF COMMUNION IN THE CHURCH

The communion we have seen in the Church as I have explained above should have a source. Basically the communion in the Church is between the Christian themselves and between them and the head-Jesus Christ. It is from the document on the Church by Second Vatican II Council that we are told “the universal Church is seen to be a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁷ After Jesus accomplished the work he was given by the Father, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order to keep on sanctifying the Church and that consequently, those who believe might have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father. (Cf. Eph. 2: 18)

The Church has to be a community as the Trinity is a community. The elements, which we can see in the community of the Trinity, are intimate loving and, full participation of the three members, absolute equality of persons and out stretch to the others.⁴⁸ The three Eternal ones, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are turned towards one another. Each divine person goes out of self and surrenders to the other two, giving life, love, wisdom, goodness and everything possessed. The three divine

⁴⁷ LG 4.

⁴⁸ J. O'HALLORAN, *Small Christian Communities*, 14.

persons are distinct not in order to be separated but to come together and to be able to give themselves to one another.⁴⁹

In the Church we are struggling to live a life of love and sharing, hence becoming one. The roots of this experience should be found in the Blessed Trinity. In the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, through their intimate loving and sharing are one God, or one community. Leonardo Boff, commenting on the Trinity maintains “we need to move from the solitude of the one to the communion of the divine three-Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. In the beginning is communion among several, wealth of diversity, union as expression of the surrender of one divine person to the other.”⁵⁰ If God means three divine persons in eternal communion among themselves, then we must conclude that we also, sons and daughters, are called to communion. We are image and likeness of the Trinity. Therefore, we have to live in communion found in the Trinity.

2.5 PARTICIPATION OF THE LAITY IN BRINGING COMMUNION IN THE CHURCH TODAY

Lay people “are the faithful who by Baptism are incorporated into Christ, are placed in the people of God, and in their own way share the priestly, prophetic and kingly office of Christ, and to the best of their ability carry on the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.”⁵¹ It was stated very clearly by the Synod of 1987 that what Vatican II expresses in *LG* 31 leads to the conclusion that there is one chosen people of God, one lord, one faith, one baptism (Cf. Eph. 4:5). Hence, there is only one common dignity from the baptism, which

⁴⁹ L. BOFF, *Holy Trinity*, 3.

⁵⁰ L. BOFF, *Holy Trinity*, 1-2.

⁵¹ *LG* 31.

disqualifies any inequality arising from race or nationality, social condition or sex.⁵² Being one in Christ, they have to make sure that the seed of unity, hope, love and truth in them should bear fruits. They have to know that they are also instruments of salvation for all. They are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. Vatican II Council put clearly that the Church is not supposed to be too much hierarchical but rather it is the whole people of God.

The Holy Spirit distributes special charisms among the faithful of every rank, making them fit to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church. Because of this we claim a full participation of the Laity in the Church-working hand in hand with the clergy in the Church. It is on this basis that Parish Council was started and what we call diocesan Pastoral council making sure that the lay leaders have a voice. The main aim here is to co-ordinate and cooperate with the clergy.

Therefore the Laity should supply the needs of their fellow human beings and they should be a source of consolation no less to the Pastors than to the rest of the faithful. (Cf. 1 Cor. 16:17-18) Their participation in the liturgical life of their community is needed. However, they should not forget that they have to engage zealously in the apostolic work of the Church, drawing men and women towards the Church who had been perhaps very far away from it. This is the true love derived from Jesus Christ. They have to participate in the spread of the word of God, particularly by catechetical instruction, something that they do in the SCCs.

⁵² T. BELLAGAMBA, "The Laity in Vatican II" 5.

Today many of the laity are aware that Christianity begins at home. Hence, their vocation is more than participating at a Sunday mass.⁵³ SCCs take this part whereby the Laity take charge of prayers and coordinators of all the activities of the SCCs. Their action within the Christian communities is so necessary that without it the apostolate of the pastors will frequently be unable to obtain its full effect.⁵⁴ So, the Parish Church must be complemented by the home Church. We have to remember that SCCs are almost like the first Christian Community in Jerusalem who were meeting in houses/families for breaking of the bread. Today many established Parishes have Parish Council and every Diocese has Pastoral Council where the laity participate fully.

2.6 CONCLUSION

The Christians are called to communion just as the Father and Son are in communion. This communion should be seen in the Church, which is the Body of Christ and people of God. In this communion we have to see the participation of the laity and the clergy in making the church one. We have to remember that structurally the SCC is the most local unity of the Church. The family is the 'domestic Church', but of its very nature it has to reach out to other families and the SCCs are made up of several family groups. Together they make up the parish, united with the local pastor. They form part of the parish, of the diocese, and of the universal Church.

⁵³ J. BAUR, *The Catholic Church in Kenya* 198.

⁵⁴ AA 10.

CHAPTER 3: HOW SCCS BRING COMMUNION AMONG THE PARISHIONERS OF ST. BHAKITA CATHOLIC CHURCH

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we are going to examine the role played by the SCCs in bringing unity among the faithful of St. Bhakita Catholic Church. It will involve also their understanding about SCCs. I will also compare my personal experience of SCCs at St. Bhakita Church and in Tanzania.

3.2. ST. BHAKITA CATHOLIC CHURCH, ITS LOCATION AND ECONOMIC ACTIVITY OF THE PEOPLE

St. Bhakita Catholic Church is one of the centers in St. Mary's Catholic Church, Mukuru Parish in Nairobi, Kenya. This Parish is run by Spiritan Fathers; Fr. Patrick O'Toole the Parish Priest and Fr. Peter Mashaka. It is located in Nairobi Province, Makadara Division in Embakasi Constituency. The faithful of this Church are mainly casual workers who work in the industries. Others are involved in small scale business sectors such as private schools, clinics and dispensaries, telephone bureaus, vegetable sheds, retail shops, carpentry, metal works and hard wares. This area is densely populated. It has two big estates Imara Daima and Pipeline estate, which are adjacent to Mukuru Slum.

In this Church we have members coming almost from all tribes of Kenya. The big number of faithful are Kamba, followed by Kikuyu, then Luo, Kisii and the Luya respectively. Due to the Church member's different backgrounds it is very difficult to run such a center.

3.3 SCCS AT ST. BHAKITA CATHOLIC CHURCH

St. Bhakita Catholic Church has 10 SCCs, which are quite active. The whole Parish St. Mary's Catholic Church has over 30 SCCs, which are active. I came to learn that people like very much the SCCs because of the advantages received from them. Regina Makau said, "We like our SCCs very much and we do attend the meetings of SCCs because it is necessary for our Christian life. You know, they help us to grow in our faith more that we could meet only on Sundays for Mass at the main center. They help us to live in communion with one another."⁵⁵ Some of the SCCs in this Church meet two or three times a week.⁵⁶ In one or two of these days they meet for prayers, Bible sharing and discussion on any arising problem in their community. The other day is essentially for praying rosary.⁵⁷ A member explained, "We need to recognize the role of Mary in our Church. She is the one who intercedes for us so that we may grow more in our faith."⁵⁸ The Parish Priest of St. Mary's Parish Fr. Patrick O'Toole, CSSp initiated the idea of praying rosary in the SCCs, as a way of helping the Christians to understand the role of Mary in the Catholic Church.

⁵⁵ REGINA MAKAU, A member of St. Gregory SCC, Interviewed on 5th December 2004.

⁵⁶ This system is used by four SCCs out of ten. The other six meet weekly.

⁵⁷ The simple services like visiting the sick, the old, participating in burial services is done after the meeting or at any other time planned by the leaders of the SCC.

⁵⁸ REGINA MAKAU, A member of St. Gregory SCC, Interviewed on 5th December 2004

Fr. Alex⁵⁹ founded SCCs at St. Mary's Parish – Mukuru between 1990 and 1999. He started these communities in line with resolutions of the Bishops of AMECEA. Moreover, he wanted to help the Christians to know each other so as to break the urban mentality of individualism whereby even neighbors do not know each other. SCCs gave the people a nice opportunity to share the word of God and pray together, and to be in position to help one another in case of a need. In the process of starting these communities, Fr. Alex was successful in the slum area but to the contrary he got a lot of difficulties in the estate areas where people saw no need of SCCs. They always claimed to be busy with their work during the weekdays. Weekends, a time which could be used for SCCs meetings were for them a time to rest with their families. However, today this problem is no longer there since most of these people meet for SCCs at least once per week in the late evening.

3.4 ELEMENTS THAT EXPRESS COMMUNION IN THE SCCS

3.4.1 Bible and Faith Sharing

The AMECEA Bishops noted that the word of God has a great role to play in establishing and forming SCCs. They said that:

The word of God is vital for building Christian Community... The risen Christ is the center of all Christian Community, and he communicates himself in various ways; among these, the word of God is basic, for, by awakening the response of faith in us, it leads us to a deeper realization of the mystery of Christ among us, our hope of Glory. God's Word is creative and effective, and it cuts into our hearts like a two-edged sword, calling us for conversion and renewal.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ ALEX is a Comboni priest who was working in Korockocho slum by that time.

⁶⁰ AMECEA Plenary Study Conference 1979, 271

On the same line, Pope John Paul II put it clear that “Small Christian Communities are a means of evangelization and of the initial proclamation of the Gospel because in them people listen to the word of God.”⁶¹

SCCs need the word of God to help them to grow in faith. Most of the faithful of St. Bhakita Catholic Church are aware of the aim of the word of God as presented by AMECEA Bishops. Whenever they meet in their SCCs meetings the word of God is read and shared among the members reflecting on how this word has touched their lives. This is a good opportunity for them to take this word and proclaim it outside their community. The members of every community are encouraged to come for the meetings with their Bibles in order to learn how to use them. One member said “we have been told to buy Bibles for our families. It is also encouraged to carry them with us when we come for SCCs meetings. This has been helping us because today most of us know how to open the Bible without any problem.”⁶²

Generally I came to learn that the word of God is given the first priority in all the SCCs at St. Bhakita Church. The members of the SCCs in this center are very active and eager to know much about the word of God. I noticed that during the time of sharing, many questions are presented for discussion. Sometimes those questions, which are not answered clearly, are put aside to be presented to the priest when he comes to celebrate Mass.

⁶¹ J. PAUL II, *The Mission of the Church*, 88.

⁶² JOHN TONO, A member of St. Augustine SCC, Interviewed on 28th November, 2004

3.4.2 Eucharistic Celebration

In the Eucharist we celebrated the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. It is a Sacrament of love, a sign of unity, a bond of charity and a Paschal banquet in which Christ is consumed.⁶³ Having this in mind, this celebration should become a foundation and praxis of every SCC. The AMECEA Bishops put it very clear that “Not Christian community ... can be built up unless it has its basis and center in the celebration of the most holy Eucharist ... if this celebration is to be sincere and thorough, it must lead to various works of charity and mutual help, as well as missionary activity and different forms of Christian witness.”⁶⁴

The celebration of the Mass in the SCCs help the members to see the role and need of Mass in their lives, taking over from the traditional sacrifices. Mass is a perfect sacrifice made by our Lord Jesus Christ. Since it is celebrated in their homes, people feel more the presence of our Lord in their families than when they come for Mass on Sundays. People feel a lot of blessings after the celebration as one member expressed it. “I was very happy when the celebration of Mass was held at my home. I felt Jesus’ presence in my house.”⁶⁵

Being a celebration of unity, people are joined together by sharing the body of Christ, which is the source of unity in the Church. It is true that at least all those who receive the body of Christ do so when the Mass is celebrated in their SCC. Always this is perpetuated by the Sacrament of Reconciliation, which is always celebrated before the Mass.

⁶³ A. MRINGI, *Communio at the Grass roots*, 267.

⁶⁴ A. MRINGI, *Communio at the Grass roots*, 267 (AMECEA Plenary Study Conference 1973, 9-10).

⁶⁵ VERONICA KAMAU, A Member of St. Basil SCC, Interviewed on 28th November, 2004

3.4.3 Prayers

This is one of the most important activities within SCCs. We learn that even Jesus himself emphasized the need to pray when he told his apostles and disciples: “Watch and pray that you may not enter into temptation.” (Mk 6:46) In prayer, one communicates directly with God. “Since the foundation of Small Christian Communities is God himself, community members are justly presumed and indeed expected to communicate with God always both individually and as a group.”⁶⁶ Prayers are done at the homes of the community members by rotation to make sure that every family or home is visited.

Prayer is one of the elements, which unites the members of the SCCs of St. Bhakita Church. This element unites the faithful with God and with one another. By the fact of uniting people together, it becomes a very important element in the meetings of a SCC. The members participate fully in prayers as they do pray for the whole Church and for individual cases.

It was mentioned that prayer time helps the members to learn also how to pray. “I remember that when I joined the SCC, I did not know how to pray well, but after some time I came to learn a lot of prayers in the SCC meetings.”⁶⁷ Most members of the SCCs I visited said that Rosary was once a very difficult prayer, known to very few individuals. However, through praying it often and some instructions given by the catechist of each SCC people came to know it by heart.

⁶⁶ A. MRINGI, *Communio at the Grass roots*, 264.

⁶⁷ THOMAS KIKO, A member of Youth Group from St. John the Baptist SCC. Interviewed on 28th November, 2004

3.4.4 Parish Meetings

Parish meetings are held every month at St. Bhakita Catholic Church. The representatives from all the SCCs form these meetings. It also involves the leaders of this center. On their meetings they discuss issues pertaining the development of the center in general and other matters in line with the needs of the center. The Parish Priest and his assistant attend these meetings also.

After the meetings, whatever was discussed is taken to the SCCs by the representatives for confirmation or for further discussion. It is a nice time for the members of the SCCs to participate in the discussion and share their views. However, it is another way of getting to know each other more deeply. It is also a time to discover the talents of each other especially when it comes a time to give suggestions.

3.5 TOGETHER IN BUIBLING UP THE KINGDOM OF GOD

3.5.1 Solidarity with the Poor and the Sick

Living in the world dominated by capitalist mode of existence, we cannot claim that we do not have the poor among us. It is not only the poor but we have also the old people and the sick who always need our care and assistance. It is our teaching as Christians that we have to show love to the poor and the needy because by doing so, we are doing it to God himself. (Cf Mt 25:31-40) It is also a responsibility of SCC to know their people who are in need in the community. Hence, money or any goods are contributed in order to help them.

SCCs at St. Bhakita Catholic Church have a program of making a contribution for the poor and the needy. Tono said “We are all poor but some are

poor than the others. Just imagine some of us do not have even food to eat. These are the people we help first before moving on to another stage of buying clothes and shoes to those who do not have.”⁶⁸ The poor are identified through visitation done by the leaders of the SCCs. This visitation is done regardless of a religion of a person. This is a step towards inter-religious dialogue. They have also a program of visiting the sick in order to console them, pray for them and give them some money for their upkeep.⁶⁹

3.5.2 Evangelization

The people of God in the theological understanding of *Lumen Gentium* have received the mandate, which is both an honour and a duty to proclaim the Gospel. Hence, the community needs to be motivated and empowered for evangelization. SCCs are called to proclaim the Good news of Christ through the witness of life. Due to the fact that SCCs belong to the Church, they are called to evangelize. “Evangelization is in fact the grace and vocation proper to the Church, her deepest identity. She exists in order to evangelize.”⁷⁰ In fact this is what the SCCs are supposed to do.

The SCCs at St. Bhakita Church proclaim the word of God first of all to members themselves. On the first level, it is done by the few individuals who share the reading according to their personal experience. Besides this, every member is called to live according to what has been preached in the SCCs. Mathias Kimuli said, “We do have to preach to one another as we meet in the SCC. Above all we are

⁶⁸ JOHN TONO, A Member of St. Augustine SCC, Interviewed on 28th November, 2004

⁶⁹ It also includes those who are H.I.V positive. The visitation to the sick is done by all the members of SCCs, different from the visitation to identify the poor which is done by the leaders only

⁷⁰ J. PAUL II, *The Church in Africa*, 41.

invited to live according to what we preach. This helps even those who do not attend the SCCs meetings to realize the need of SCCs.”⁷¹ Through preaching people are more involved in the communal aspect of the Church. In this way they are witness to the gospel.

3.5.3 Justice and Peace

At the moment of ascension into heaven, Jesus gave his disciples the mandate for Peace. As we all know, there is no Peace if Justice is not there. Learning from the mandate given to the disciples, the Church has to promote Justice and Peace. The Lord says, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called Sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 5:9-10)”⁷² It is a duty and responsibility of all the Christians to make sure that Justice and Peace prevail in the Church and in the world at large.

SCCs have this role to play within and outside themselves. This is very important especially for the lay faithful who hold public offices, because such witness demands an abiding spiritual attitude and a way of life consistent with the Christian faith. They are to make sure that no body is oppressed or treated badly. In all the SCCs of St. Bhakita Church, there is one person in charge of Justice and Peace. This person is called the animator for Justice and Peace. Together, all the animators from every SCC form a commission for Justice and Peace in the Center. Charles Kyalo said, “We are fighting against the oppression and corruption in our country. We have many problems and no one seems to be concerned. For instance

⁷¹ MATHIAS KIMULI, A Chairperson of St. Gregory SCC, Interviewed on 14th November, 2004

⁷² J. PAUL II, *The Church in Africa*, 78

we lack water and proper latrines in the slum area and no body has temped to attend our problems. What we have been doing is to remind the counselor of the areas, which need quick attention.”⁷³ Hence, we realize that this commission for Justice and Peace is working hard to improve the living standard of the people.

3.6 CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED BY THE SCCS AT ST. BHAKITA CHURCH.

The biggest challenge encountered by the SCCs at this center is poor attendance. This is caused by lack of commitment on one side and on the other side some people do not know the aim of SCCs in the Church. Many people think that attending Mass on Sundays is enough hence no need of attending SCCs. Due to this problem many people come for the meetings of SCCS when they need a help from the Church. Tono said “When it comes a time for preparation for a certain Sacrament many Christians join the SCCs meetings for a short while till they receive the Sacrament needed and that is the end of their attendance.”⁷⁴

Tribalism is another problem faced by the SCCs at St. Bhakita Catholic Church. Among the many tribes that reside in Mukuru, the Kambas are a dominant tribe in the area. This causes other tribes to feel oppressed and in turn it causes a lot of complaints. Besides that most of the SCCs meet on tribe basis. You can find a Christian moving to a very far place from his/her home area, in order to join a certain SCC because most of the members are from his/her tribe. However, this is a big problem among them but it is in some SCCs.

⁷³ CHARLES KYALO, Animator for Justice and Peace from St. Bhakita SCC, interviewed on 21st November, 2004

⁷⁴ JOHN TONO, A Member of St. Augustine SCC, Interviewed on 28th November, 2004

Language is another problem, which is faced by the SCCs at St. Bhakita Church. In the slum area many aged people do not know Kiswahili very well. In the Estate areas most of the SCCs use English which cut off some members who do not speak English. This leads to poor attendance and poor participation during Bible sharing.

Another problem is that men and youth do not attend in good number in the meetings of SCCs.⁷⁵ Also there is a problem of poor contribution when it comes a time to contribute for a certain event, being a contribution for the poor and the sick in the Parish or any other. The SCCs at St. Bhakita Catholic Church do not have a written document to guide them in prayer.

A few SCCs are only prayer groups. This is to say that even their meetings for Bible sharing is very poor let alone the other social activities.

3.7 COMPARISON WITH MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF SCCS IN TANZANIA

According to my personal experience of SCCs in Tanzania especially in Arusha and Kilimanjaro, I came to learn that the SCCs in Tanzania are more developed than the ones at St. Bhakita Church. In Tanzania each diocese provide booklets, which give a program to be used in the SCCs during their meetings. This program contains the prayers to be prayed in SCCs, the Bible readings for every week, and the methods to be used in organizing the activities of the SCCs. It is encouraged that every member to have these booklets. St. Bhakita Catholic Church does not have such booklets

⁷⁵ It is only on one SCC out of the ten SCCs at St. Bhakita Catholic Church which has a big number of men attending the SCC meeting

In Tanzania, many Christians attend the meetings of SCCs. SCCs are considered as very important element of Christian life. However, the problem of attendance is there but not serious like what I have observed at St. Bhakita Catholic Church.

SCCs meetings are for everybody that is to say adult, youth and children as well. In Tanzania this is observed very well different from what I experienced at St. Bhakita Catholic Church whereby it is only the adult and few youth who attend the meetings of SCCs.

In Tanzania some Sacraments such as Baptism, Penance, Holy Eucharist and Marriage are officiated in the SCCs. In addition to that a SCC provide a recommendation for her member who is to receive any of the Sacraments in the Church. At St. Bhakita Catholic Church the SCCs play only a role of recommending those who are to receive Sacraments in the Church.

At St. Bhakita Catholic Church what is very interesting to me is the methodology used in sharing the word of God. They have a system whereby every body gets a chance to share what has touched him/her from the Scripture reading. In Tanzania it is only one of the leaders who breaks the word of God.

Other activities like Justice and Peace, visiting the sick and the poor, evangelization and participation of the SCCs in the Parish meetings; the same method is used both in Tanzania and in St. Bhakita Church.

3.8 CONCLUSION

We need SCCs in order to express the communion, which the Church is called to live in a more profound way. As we have seen above, SCCs at St. Bhakita Church are contributing a lot in bringing communion among the parishioners in the

neighborhood, regardless of the problems facing SCCs. Tono said, “we need SCCs, they are like a small Church encouraging the Christians to join together for Bible sharing, praying together and helping each other in case of a need.”⁷⁶ Hence, we need to encourage the faithful to join SCCs in order to benefit from what SCCs offer.

⁷⁶ JOHN TONO, A Member of St. Augustine SCC, Interviewed on 28th November, 2004

CHAPTER 4: PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I am going to give some suggestions that can improve our SCCs at St. Bhakita Church. I will also present some of the suggestions made by the members of St. Bhakita Church.

4.2 EDUCATION OF THE RESPECTIVE MISSIONARIES AND FAITHFUL

4.2.1 Seminars

Seminars are very helpful in providing education on a certain subject. Here we talk of educating the missionaries working with the SCCs at St. Bhakita Church especially on how SCCs can be agent of communal life in the Church. It is true that the Missionaries working at Mukuru know little about SCCs hence a need to provide them with seminars to get to know more about SCCs. The faithful as well are to attend some seminars on the aim and how the SCCs are to be organized. This is to help them to know the necessity of SCCs in their lives as Christians.

We should also think of participation evaluation. It means that the members of SCCs are to participate in evaluating the progress of SCCs in the Parish.⁷⁷

4.2.2 Workshops

Workshops should be organized to help the Missionaries and faithful to know much about SCCs. In these workshops, discussion should be allowed to the

⁷⁷ This kind of evaluation is to be done annually in order to help the Parish to plan for greater achievements. It is a time to assign new tasks to the members for a greater success. It is also a time to identify the problems and difficulties, which have been there in order to look for ways on how to tackle them.

participants in order to get their views on how to improve SCCs. Kyalo noted, “ We have a lot of ideas on how to make our SCCs alive. The problem is that people are not accorded the chance to give their ideas.”⁷⁸ In deed this will help to improve communal life in the Church.

There is also a need to train the leaders of SCCs on the organization and management of SCCs. This will enable them to be in a position of animating the SCCs totally.

4.2.3 Literature about the SCCs made available

In most of the cases the literature about the SCCs is only available in the Bookshops but not to the faithful. This is caused by the fact that these booklets are quite expensive for most of the people especially those who live in the slum. Tono suggested that, “There is a need to provide the booklets which contain the program of SCCs meetings close to the people. He added that these booklets should be sold at a fair price to enable the faithful to buy them. On the same line these booklets are supposed to be read by he missionaries working in this area.

4.2.4 Preaching

Preaching is one of the ways of challenging and encouraging people on their ways of life. It is a fact that what is preached during Mass is taken more seriously than any thing said elsewhere. Hence, the Missionaries should sensitize the people on the need and importance of being a member of a SCC. It should involve the use of Bible passages, which talk about the life of the early Christian community, which is the model of our today’s SCCs.

⁷⁸ CHARLES KYALO, Animator for Justice and Peace from St. Bhakita SCC, Interviewed on 14th November, 2004

4.3 WE SHOULD PRAY FOR THE SUCCESS OF SCCS

It is now a high time that regardless of the efforts put on dealing with the success of our SCCs, prayers should not be forgotten. Most of the time we should remember to pray for the success of the SCCs. This involves some special prayers to be prepared in a written form that the faithful can say them during their meetings. Regina observed, "Today our faith in prayers has gone down because no body is encouraging us to pray for our SCCs in our center."⁷⁹ This is a challenge for the Missionaries working at St. Bhakita Catholic Church to see how they can encourage the faithful on this matter.

4.4 MUCH EMPHASIS SHOULD BE PUT ON BUILDING STRONG SCCS

In starting a new SCC there is a need to give a strong foundation that will help the members to remain tide in their communities. Here we should think of providing seminars and workshops before starting a SCC for those who will be convinced to join. This calls for full participation of the priests and the faithful in making sure that real education is provided before an advent of a SCC.

Lumko institute provided us with some booklets, which provides guideline on how to start a SCC. These booklets are supposed to be read by the people so that they may be aware of the steps to follow in building a SCC.

⁷⁹Regina Makau, A member of St. Gregory SCC, Interviewed on 5th December 2004

4.5 SCCS AND CONFERING OF THE SACRAMENTS

A SCC is the most local unity of the Church after the family. According to AMECEA Bishops, this community is a local and essentially a Eucharistic community, that is oriented towards the Eucharist, and it finds its fullest meaning in the Eucharist. This community manifests locally the presence of Christ among persons especially through the liturgy, which is by nature a community celebration. Liturgy becomes more prominent during the communal celebration of the Sacraments like Baptism, Penance, Confirmation, Anointing of the Sick, Sacred orders and Matrimony, which ensure the existence and continuity of the community.⁸⁰

The SCCs need these Sacraments that are by nature vehicles of grace for growing. Augustine Mringi says, “Sacramental life is a *conditio sine qua non* of the community to see to it that members lead that life properly.”⁸¹ Hence, these Sacraments are to be celebrated in the SCCs and the candidates for such Sacraments are to be approved by the SCCs.

At St. Bhakita Church, the SCCs play an important role in preparing the candidates for Baptism, first communion, Confirmation and Matrimony and any of the Sacraments. For them the candidates are registered and are provided with some basics on Catechism before taken to the Catechist at the center. Also those who want to join seminary life and convents pass through the SCCs in order to get a written recommendation from their Parish Priest.

⁸⁰A. MRINGI, *Communio at the Grass roots*, 269-270

⁸¹A. MRINGI, *Communio at the Grass roots*, 270

4.6 OTHER GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

In order to propagate the aspect of communion among the SCCs in a Parish, there is a need to bring the SCCs together for things like drama, parties, singing competition and other entertainments. This can be done once a year. Besides that catechesis for children and adult in preparation for the Sacraments like Baptism, first communion, Confirmation and Matrimony should be more emphasized in the SCCs.

We have also to encourage the priests to visit the SCCs often and listen to their problems. They have to be aware that their participation in SCCs is more that celebrating the Sacraments.

SCCs are supposed to participate in the issues of preventing H.I.V and Aids. They are to involve themselves in giving education to the people on how to eradicate this deadly disease. There is also a need to encourage the SCCs to consider conflicts as a way forward in developing the SCCs rather than running away when conflicts and tensions arise.⁸²

1.7 CONCLUSION

What is important on this part is to make sure that people are well informed about the purpose, aim, structure and challenges of the SCCs in order to be in a position to make them more active. Time has come to educate both Missionaries and the Christians about SCCs. They should know that SCCs are not prayer groups but a community made by Christian families in order to promote communion in the Church.

⁸² Conflicts are inevitable in our lives. When taken constructively, conflicts direct the efforts towards finding solutions. They also stimulate interest and curiosity. They force clarification and challenge the old habits and restores dynamic creativity that existed during the organization's formative stage.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

SCCs were started in Eastern Africa in 1970's after they already existed in Latin America in 1960's. It was the initiative of the Bishops of Africa as they were concerned with many challenges, which disturbed the Church by that time. Some of these challenges were the search for African Ecclesial identity and self-reliance. It was for them that SCCs could help to face the challenges I have mentioned and many others that were there. Regardless of the difficulties faced in establishing and developing the SCCs in Eastern Africa, the Bishops of AMECEA did not give up. It was because of the motivation they put on the SCCs that is why we have them today.

Through the SCCs the laity get a chance to play their role expressed by *Apostolic Exhortation Christifideles Laici*. The issue is that the laity should participate in the mission of the Church, which is centered on evangelization as Mark put it, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation." (Mk 16:15) In a very profound way, the SCCs give an opportunity for each person to fulfill his/her vocation as a Christian. Every member gets a chance to participate in the Church activities in different areas. Besides the participation in the activities of the Church, SCCs give the members a chance to share in a unique way what they possess.

I came to realize that SCCs are important in making viable the communion expected in the Church. Through Bible sharing, Eucharistic celebration, prayers, and participation in the parish meetings, members of the SCCs are involved fully in the activities of the Church. Then in solidarity with the poor, the old and the sick and involvement in evangelization and Justice and Peace, SCCs do, share and learn from what the early Christian community was doing. It is from this line that the early

Christian community has to inspire our SCCs today for a good and well structure Church at the grass root.

In this essay we have seen that communion is brought by harmony and peace in the activities of the SCCs. However, one thing I have learnt from my research is that conflicts and tensions are an inevitable part of any community. Hence when faced creatively and positively help the group to grow.

Today, the Church is appealing to all the Catholics to involve themselves with the activities of SCCs. It is a due time now that everybody has to join SCCs. It is in this way that the SCCs will be a witness to others as far as evangelization is concerned the same as the earl Christians were. Hence, we should not deny the fact that communion is necessary for the Local Church. We need a spirit of communion the way we have seen it expressed by the SCCs at St. Bhakita Catholic Church. The parishioners from the other Parishes in the world are expected to show the same efforts shown by the parishioners of St. Bhakita Church. In this third millennium we are called for the participation and sharing without forgetting the fraternal love for the members of the Church.

I would like to conclude my work saying that SCCs are effective means of communion. This communion can be seeing in the activities done by SCCs in every parish, diocese and the universal Church. This is the way of being the Church as having a model of the unity which is in the Holy Trinity that is to say between the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. However, we are to remember that SCCs are to be fully supported to make them more effective.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

1. **SCCs**- Small Christian Communities
2. **TEC**- Tanzania Episcopal Conference
3. **AMECEA**- Association of Members of Episcopal Conference of Eastern Africa.
4. **LG**- Lumen Gentium
5. **BECs** -- Basic Ecclesial Communities
6. **AA** -- Apostolicam Actuositatem
7. **EN** – Evangelii Nuntiandi

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE PRIESTS AT ST. MARY'S CATHOLIC CHURCH, MUKURU

PLEASE CIRCLE THE LETTER WITH YOUR ANSWER.

1. When the small Christian communities were started in your Parish?
 - a) Before 1980
 - b) 1980 - 1989
 - c) 1990 -1999
 - d) 2000 – 2004.
2. Up to now, how many SCCs do you have in your Parish?
 - a) 1- 5
 - b) 6 - 10
 - c) 11 - 20
 - d) 20 -30
 - e) Over 30
 - f) Unknown
3. What is the structure of the SCCs in your Parish?
 - a) Geographical neighbours meet together
 - b) People from the same language (not necessarily neighbours)
 - c) People of the same clan meet together
 - d) Other (specify)

.....
4. How many families are in a SCC?
 - a) 1-5
 - b) 5 -10
 - c) 10 – 15
 - d) Over 15
 - e) Unknown
5. How many times do the SCCs meet?
 - a) Weekly
 - b) Twice weekly
 - c) Every two weeks monthly
 - d) Before important functions
 - e) Other (specify)

.....
6. Among the following choices of activities, which ones do the SCCs in your Parish participate in?
 - a) The children catechesis
 - b) Adult catechesis
 - c) Full Rite of Christian Initiation of Adult (RCIA)
 - d) Evangelising rallies
 - e) Instruction for the sacrament of Marriage?
 - f) Other (specify)

.....
7. How many SCCs do you visit in your Parish every month?
 - a) 1 -4
 - b) 5 –8
 - c) 9 or more
 - d) Irregular
 - e) Do not visit
8. How often do you visit each SCC?
 - a) Yearly
 - b) Twice yearly
 - c) 2 – 4 times per year
 - d) Other (specify)

.....
9. What do you do at SCC gathering?
 - a) Join them in Bible sharing and listen to their faith experience
 - b) To celebrate Eucharist and reconciliation
 - c) Preaching
 - d) Other (specify)

.....

10. How do you accompany the Parish SCCs?

- a) Encourage their activities
- b) Be present for election of leaders
- c) Visitation of the homes of the sick
- d) Other (specify)

11. Among the following sacraments, which ones do you confer them in the SCCs?

- a) Infant Baptism
- b) Reconciliation
- c) Marriage
- d) Eucharist
- e) Anointing of the sick
- f) Other (specify)

12. Explain your Choice in number 11

13. How the SCCs represented in the Parish council meetings

- a) Each SCC sends representative
- b) 2 – 4 representatives for all the SCCs
- c) 1 representative for all the SCCs
- d) No representative
- e) Other (specify)

14. Who started the SCCs in your Parish? Please mention the name and the title of the person.

15. What are the activities of the SCCs in your Parish?

- a) Home visit
- b) Visit the sick
- c) Children catechesis
- d) Micro finance
- e) Visit the needy
- f) Collection for the needy
- g) Justice and peace
- h) Neighbourhood improvement action
- i) Other (specify)

16. We know that prayer is very important in SCCs. What are the main prayers do your small Christian communities pray in their gatherings?

- a) Rosary
- b) Intercession prayers
- c) Other (specify)

17. What are the main problems in the SCCs in your Parish?

- a) They are only prayer groups
- b) Only women attend
- c) Fights (quarrel) over money
- d) Poor attendance
- e) Other (specify)

PLEASE CIRCLE THE LETTER WITH YOUR ANSWER

- 55

11. How the SCCs represented in the Parish council meetings

- a) Each SCC sends representative b) 2 – 4 representatives for all the SCCs
c) 1 representative for all the SCCs d) No representative
e) Other (specify)

12. What is the name of your SCC?

13. How many leaders do you have in your SCC?

Men

Women

14. What are the main activities of your SCC?

- a) Home visit b) Visit the sick c) Children catechesis
d) Micro finance e) Visit the needy f) Collection for the needy
g) Justice and peace h) Neighbourhood improvement action i) Other
(specify)

15. Where do you meet as SCC?

- a) Same place b) Rotate to different houses c) 2-3 houses only
d) Other (specify)

16. How often does a priest visit your SCC?.....

- a) Monthly b) every 2 – 4 months c) Yearly
d) Never

17. What are the main problems you face in your SCC?

- a) It is only a prayer group b) Only women attend c) Fights
(quarrel) over money d) Poor attendance e) Other (specify)

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