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PASTORAL SOLUTIONS TO THE OBSTACLES IN THE GROWTH OF SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN ST. MASSIMO PARISH – MERU DIOCESE, KENYA

Moderator

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of a Master's Degree in Pastoral Ministry

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DEDICATION

With great humility, love and respect, I dedicate this work to my beloved late parents; Joseph R. Muttai and Rael Kathambi Muttai. I am what I am because of them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As I complete my Master's Thesis in Pastoral Ministry, I sincerely thank the Almighty God who has made it possible for me to reach this far. I cannot forget to extend my gratitude and appreciation to my late parents who brought me up with great love and care. They educated me and brought me up as a God fearing person and an active Christian.

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To everyone who assisted me in any way, I say thank you very much and may God bless you.

STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned, declare that this Thesis is my original piece of work. It has never been submitted to Tangaza or any other Institute of learning for any education award. All other sources used have been fully cited and references acknowledged.

Signed; ……

Name of Student: ……

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ABBREVIATIONS

Acts	Acts of the Apostles
AMECEA	Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa
Col	Letter to the Colossians
Cor	Letter to the Corinthians
CCC	The Catechism of the Catholic Church
DOM	Diocese of Meru
Gen	Book of Genesis
Jn	Book of St. John
LG	Lumen Gentium
Mt	Gospel According to Mathew
PPC	Parish Pastoral Council
Rm	Letter to the Romans
SCC	Small Christian Communities
Tm	Letter to Timothy
TOT	Training of Trainers

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The concept of a community is very well understood by an African because that is the daily practical way of life. As many scholars have observed, Africans find value in life when that life is well shared. When the concept of Small Christian Communities was introduced especially within the AMECEA countries in 1973, the idea was received with a lot of enthusiasm and excitement. It is a fact that in the Catholic Church today in Africa, there are many good things happening. These include an increase in active Catholic Christian population, Christian marriages and growth of Small Christian Communities. According to Joseph Healey who lives in Nairobi, Kenya, there are over 180,000 Small Christian Communities in the nine AMECEA countries in East Africa. Kenya alone has over 45,000 Small Christian Communities almost as many as the whole of the United States.

When Missionaries came to Africa to spread the good news, they brought with them many projects and programs. Schools and hospitals were started and built in different parts of the country. Devotional groups were also started especially the rosary of our Lady. This had a big positive impact to an African Christian, but with the introduction of the Small Christian Communities, life changed, a new way of life was introduced. Praying together, reading and sharing the word of God and eventually living the Gospel, was the best idea for the growth of Catholic Christianity for the Church in Africa. It is a fact however to note that Small Christian Communities are neither projects nor programs. Small Christian Communities are a new way of life that is to be understood and lived.

Introduction and growth of Small Christian Communities within the Church brought with it many challenges in Africa. Among them is absenteeism especially within men and the youth, lateness to SCC activities, low participation to SCC activities including shared prayers and bible sharing, lack of knowledge on how to establish and run the SCC and lack of interest from some clergy and parish pastoral council members. However the major challenge I experienced at St. Massimo was the size of the SCCs. The members of each individual Small Christian Community were so large, numbers ranging between fifty and hundred families.

Therefore, the objective of my paper is to identify these challenges and try to pinpoint the pastoral solutions to some of them especially at St. Massimo Parish, Meru Diocese in Kenya. This will help to strengthen the existing Small Christian Communities, uplift the awareness of the objectives and advantages of belonging and being active in the SCC and creating right attitude towards the establishment of SCC in our neighbourhood.

1.1 STUDY BACKGROUND

There seems to be a general agreement that the introduction and proper management of the concept of Small Christian Communities in our parishes is a very good and necessary idea especially here in Africa. The joy and dedication at which people embraced this idea in different dioceses and parishes, is a proper manifestation of the same. One of the first things that Christ did in his public ministry was to gather a community around him. He left his followers with the presence of the Spirit and the gift of companionship. The early church embodied these gifts by meeting in small communities. Small Christian Communities stem from and return to the Sunday Eucharist .This constant process of gathering as a community, hearing anew the Word of God as chastisement,

challenge and commendation, taking up again our identity as the unified Body of Christ, and going forth to continue to live that which we have just experienced, is an awesome idea. As such, Small Christian Communities foster mature faith, form lay leaders, and encourage active participation in the broader life of the Church. Small communities enable people to grow in their relationship with Christ.

Pope John Paul 11, speaking to the Church in America about Small Christian Communities on 22 January, 1999 said "In such a human context it will be easier to gather to hear the word of God, to reflect on the range of human problems in the light of this word and gradually to make responsible decisions inspired by the all-embracing love of Christ."

There seems to be a lot of pastoral challenges in the field for us to realize the noble objective or idea of starting Small Christian Communities in our neighborhood. We have a lot of misunderstanding, ignorance, lack of interest, discouragement, traditional set ups and lack of focus towards the growth of SCCs. In St. Massimo parish as an example, majority of members have embraced the concept but have taken it as any other group in the village. They have given emphasis more on collecting money either for parish projects or for their own individual needs. This has brought with it the wrong idea of having many or large families in one SCC.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Like any other concept or a new way of life, the introduction of Small Christian Communities came with its own challenges. From my experience at St Massimo Parish, the number of attendance to the Small Christian Communities meetings has started going down. The greatest Challenge being the number of men and the youth that is diminishing each passing day at a very high rate. Another point of concern is the inactive aspect of those in attendance. Many shy off when time

comes to share the word of God. Mostly, a catechist or group leaders are the most active during the weekly meetings. There is also an observation that the spiritual morale of the members has gone down especially when the idea of money contribution was introduced in the weekly meetings.

Another very serious challenge is the ignorance and lack of interest from the clergy who are supposed to animate, encourage and support the growth of Small Christian Communities within their area of jurisdiction. Majority of the clergy find interest with Small Christian Community only when asking for monetary support. Very few clergy visit the community meetings and prayers. Clergy support and interest is very vital for the growth of Small Christian Community within the parish and the diocese as a whole

Due to lack of knowhow from the community members, majority have turned the Small Christian Communities into welfare groups or movements. This has resulted to a misconception that the bigger the number of members in a Small Christian Community, the better for the community in terms of money contribution. In St Massimo parish for instance, Majority of communities have more than fifty families. This has eroded the logic and the purpose of the community being referred to as small. It took the intervention of Joseph Healey to resolve the situation after we organized a one day seminar for all the parish leaders at St. Massimo Parish.

1.3 OBJECTIVE

To achieve the objective of my research, the following information is vital.

1. Evaluate the level of knowledge and awareness from the Christians and the clergy about the purpose of a Small Christian Communities in their midst.
2. Discuss the importance of the establishment and strengthening of small Christian communities within the parish.
3. Establish the level of participation of men, women and the youth.
4. Point out the challenges experienced in the maintenance and growth of Small Christian Communities.
5. Suggest practical pastoral solutions on the way forward to strengthening of the Small Christian Communities.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

The sources of this project are both primary and secondary. During the insertion or practicum, a lot of observation was done during the regular visits to various Small Christian Communities in St Massimo. Interview with both the clergy and the members of the Small Christian Communities was done. The ongoing experience and reflection took the centre stage.

Serious research both in the library and in the internet was also done as the secondary source. Online resource materials were widely used.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

My research will bring up the following important aspects in the growth of SCC.

- Come up with the proper meaning and objectives of the Small Christian Communities.
- Bring out Pastoral activities associated with the Small Christian Communities in the parishes.
- Find out the teaching of the Church in reference to the formation, growth and role of the Small Christian Communities in the parish.
- Highlight Pastoral challenges and obstacles in the growth of Small Christian Communities in the parishes, with practical reference to St. Massimo Parish in Meru Diocese, Kenya – East Africa.
- Come up with a well researched Pastoral solution to the obstacles in the growth of Small Christian Communities especially in St. Massimo Parish.
- The paper will also encourage and motivate the Clergy and the members of the Small Christian Communities never to give up despite the many challenges faced.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 MEANING OF SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES AND ITS OBJECTIVES

2.1.1 Meaning

Small Christian Communities is a concept used especially throughout Africa and also in Asia and North America, meaning a network of Parish based community of communities, small enough to create real community and personal relationships. In other words, it is a new way of life in our Church today based on the Scripture passage from the Gospel of Mathew 18:20, which says that," whenever two or three people are gathered in my name, I am there among them."

"Many different terminologies have also been used to refer to the Small Christian Communities, but a Small Christian Community can be said to be a community of communities."[1]

The Small Christian Communities are one model of church, that is, the communitarian model. "They are vibrant, spontaneous groups with little hierarchical structure. They are the faith-response of poor and marginalized people in the Catholic Church and society. They are indispensable for the development of a well grounded faith in the life of the Christian."[2] In the renewed understanding of the Church after Vatican II regarding her mission and ministry; the Small Christian Communities have been taken as a new way of being the Church. These are groups of Christians, who, at the level of family or in a similarly restricted setting, come together for prayer, scripture reading, catechesis and discussion on human and ecclesial problems with a view to a

[1] J.G Healey – J Hinton, *Small Christians Communities Today*, 7
[2] R.M. Bechthe - J.J. Rathschmidf - *Mission and Mysticism*, 43-44

common commitment. These communities are a sign of vitality within the church, an instrument of formation and evangelization.

Small Christian Communities take more root in the less privileged in rural areas and become a leaven of Christian life, of care for the poor and the neglected and of commitment to the transformation of the society. “These communities thus become a means of evangelization and a source of new ministries”.[3]

From the Biblical point of view, an introduction to the formation of Small Christian Communities can also be found in the book of Acts. **"They devoted themselves to the apostles' instruction and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers."**[4] These communities appeal to those who are zealous for evangelization and love for the Church.

Life in a Small Christian Community is simply our baptismal brotherhood and sisterhood lived out practically with a few people. We share God's word, the Eucharist, prayer, our possessions, our gifts, time, and meals. We share daily life. These communities are basic Christianity. We can devote our lives to forming them and know that we are building something that will last.

2.1.2 Objectives of the Small Christian Communities

The Small Christian Communities can be said to be places of focal points and vehicles for evangelization. Living the Christian faith means witnessing to it in our daily lives. However, one is also invited to proclaim this faith to others. Witness is very essential in proclaiming the Christian faith, because if one tries to share his/her faith without living it out, one will only be a hypocrite.

[3] V. Samuel, *The Role of Laity In Evangelization through Small Christian Communities*, 6
[4] Cf. The Acts of the Apostles 2:42

Thus, evangelization means bringing the Good News into all the spheres of humanity and through its influence transforming humanity from within and making it new. Evangelization is an encounter; it happens when one person meets another. One of the rules of "encounter" is that both the one who proclaims and the one proclaimed to, are changed. One cannot proclaim the good news of God to another, nor encounter another in faith, without change happening in both of them. "The members of the Small Christian Communities are both hearers of the gospel and privileged beneficiaries of evangelization, as well as proclaimers of the gospel themselves and they do this both in words and in actions. In and through them, the poor hear the good news."[5]

Many Catholics today, through the Small Christian Communities have developed a new love for scripture and as such, they give witness to the truth of these words. "They now explicitly discover the Word of God in the Bible as a source of nourishment for their religious life. The Word of God in scripture always serves as a source of inspiration and stimulation for their lives and actions."[6]

According to Joseph Healey, "Small Christian Communities are one of the most successful pastoral approaches in terms of the laity's involvement in evangelization: The laity evangelizing the laity and sharing their lives in the spirit of charity with the Word of God at the centre of their activity."[7] In the Small Christian Communities, lay people serve lay people in different matters, not depending on the priest's presence. They prepare people for baptism, first holy communion, confirmation and matrimony.

They visit the sick, bury the dead, and comfort each other. However, appropriate material and training is needed. But the actual preparation is done more slowly and carefully within the

[5] A. Barreiro, *Basic Ecclesial communities*-1
[6] M. dec. Azevedo, *Basic Ecclesial Communities In Brazil*-129
[7] Joseph. G. Healey, *Building the Church As A Family Of God*- 114

community itself. Thus, the poor have assumed the Gospel and are preaching it with simple eloquence, and sometimes at a very high price.

The Small Christian Communities are not only involved in proclaiming the Gospel; they are also involved in promoting reconciliation, peace and justice, healing and forgiveness among the people. For instance, the 45,000 Small Christian Communities in Kenya are very much involved in the annual Kenya Lenten Campaign organized by the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission in the country. Thus, "the Small Christian Communities can very well work as agents of promoting communion, the union of believers with God and among themselves, and thereby the believers can bear witness to Christ's love".[8]

2.2 CIVIC AND POLITICAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCCs

The SCCs are local, organized groups; they are in an ideal position to take up civic and political issues that affect their members directly. Examples are cleanliness of their area, beautification, Civic services and utilities, solving local problems, etc. On a wider platform, SCCs have been involved with, celebration of national events, creating awareness on Civic issues, etc. This aspect of Community involvement in local affairs paves the way for ushering in the concept of Small Christian Communities.

[8] V. Samuel, *The Role Of Laity In Evangelization Through Small Christian Communities*-2

2.3 SOCIO-CULTURAL ACTIVITIES IN THE SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

The neighborhood aspect of Communities comes alive frequently through a plethora of celebrations of various days, games, talent contests, get-togethers, picnics, newsletters, discussions on social, ethical, value-related issues, Christmas celebrations, etc. These activities ensure that no one remains anonymous in the Parish and facilitates a great deal of interaction and bonding among people. They also offer avenues for people to showcase their talents and charisms.

2.4 BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

The saying: *There's no place like home*, is one of the basic principles of God's word and plan of salvation. In the Old Testament, the home and the Temple were the most important places of worship and celebration. The Passover, the greatest of all Israelite celebrations, was held in homes. Jesus made the home not only a center for worship but also His base for evangelization. He told His apostles: "Look for a worthy person in every town or village you come to and stay with him until you leave. As you enter his home bless it".[9] After Pentecost, the early Church met in their homes daily for the breaking of the bread (the Eucharist) and shared meals (Acts 2:46). This resulted in the manifestation of signs and wonders, break-through in economic sharing, and wildfire evangelism. "Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved".[10] All the churches for the first 300 years of Church history were homes. Saul persecuted the Church by breaking up these home-meetings, dragging men and women out of house after house, and throwing them into jail (Acts 8:3). Peter was saved from execution through an all-night prayer-vigil at the home of Mary, John Mark's mother (Acts 12:12). Lydia, the first convert of the Western

[9] Cf. *The Gospel according to St Mathew* 10:11-12
[10] Cf. *The Acts of the Apostles* 2:47

world, made her home a church (Acts 16:15, 40). Priscilla and Aquila had the most famous home-based community in history. They strengthened Paul to return to full-time ministry (Acts 18:2-5), converted Apollos, and empowered him to minister in the Spirit (Acts 18:26). All the churches of the Gentiles owed a debt of gratitude to Priscilla and Aquila and the congregation that met in their house (Rm 16:4-5). Other notable communities were those of Nympha (Col 4:15), Titus Justus (Acts 18:7), Gaius (Rm 16:23), and Philemon (Phlm 2). The home-based community was seen as a training ground for leadership in the early Church (1 Tm 3: 5, 12)

Jesus did not work on his own but always worked together with his colleagues

forming a community of disciples. He sent these people into the world as apostles.

The first apostles did not have any stable place to organize their work of

evangelization. They always proclaimed the Gospel just travelling from one place to another. They gathered at home. They assembled in the family houses of their colleagues listening to the Word of God, sharing bread, praying together. This church assembly in the family was the fundamental unit of primitive Christianity.

In the Roman Hellenistic household, 'the paterfamilias', the father of the house, was the unspoken authority, and the structure of the family in antiquity was markedly hierarchical. By contrast, in the Christian household or house community this hierarchical model was radically broken up. Early primitive Christianity was a brotherhood and sisterhood of equal partners.

2.5 SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES EXPERIENCED IN THE LIGHT OF THE CHURCH

A Christian community is different from families and groups in at least four ways. First, each committed member of the community must be under Jesus' lordship and open to the Spirit, although others can visit and participate in various aspects of the community.

Second, a small Christian community has ecclesial, Biblical standards for brotherhood and sisterhood as its ideal. It is not only a support group, prayer group, or study group. In a community, we are trying to be one as Jesus and the Father are one (Jn 17:21). We want to love each other to the point that we will lay down our lives for one another (1 Jn 3:16). We hope to so identify with each other that if one suffers we all suffer and if one is honored we all rejoice (1 Cor 12:26).

Third, a small Christian community is similar to an extended family. Twelve adults are usually the maximum number before the community branches off to form a second community. Like Jesus' twelve apostles, this community is small enough to be personal and large enough to have many varied gifts for the up building of all the members. The community often centers on two or more Christian married couples and their families. Sometimes the community can form around a single person, as may have been the case with Lydia and John Mark's mother. The community includes single people, single parents and their children, godparents, relatives, neighbors, or anyone called to share in family life. Not all members must live under one roof, but all the members should be trying to share daily God's word, the Eucharist, prayer, time, possessions, and meals with at least some of the community's members.

Fourth, a home-based community is an "intentional" community. Many families and groups of friends are living a Biblical community life but, because they are not aware of it, they will probably not plan for continuity of leadership and branch off into new communities. Thus, they will not have their full impact on society and probably won't last until Jesus second coming.

The small communities of the early Church were not isolated but rooted in the Temple or synagogue. "They went to the temple area together every day, while in their homes they broke bread"[11] . "Day after day, both in the temple and at home, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news of Jesus the Messiah"[12] . Even when official Judaism became hostile to Christians, they stayed in the synagogue until they were expelled in 85 A.D. In addition to their roots in Judaism, the early Christian communities were united with one another in a network of support, teaching, and accountability.

Today's communities should not be islands to themselves. They should be rooted in the universal Church where by all the community members are under the authority of their pastors. Pope Paul VI stated that basic communities should remain firmly attached to the local Church in which they are inserted, and to the universal Church thus avoiding the very real danger of becoming isolated within themselves. Communities should "maintain a sincere communion with the pastors whom the Lord gives to His Church and with the magisterium"[13]

2.6 SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN THE SPIRIT OF ECCLESIOLOGY

For a Christian, the life of communion means sharing in the divine life. This is a spiritual communion in which the reality of the life of the world to come is already present. But it is

[11] Cf. The Acts of the Apostles 2:46
[12] Cf. Acts of the Apostles 5:42
[13] *Evangelization In The Modern World*-5

inadequate to speak only of an invisible spiritual unity as the fulfillment of Christ's will for the Church; the profound communion fashioned by the Spirit requires visible expression. The purpose of the visible ecclesial community is to embody and promote this spiritual communion with God.

For a local community to be a communion means that it is a gathering of the baptized brought together by the Apostolic preaching, confessing the one faith,

Celebrating the one Eucharist, and lead an apostolic ministry. "This implies that this local church is in communion with all Christian communities in which the essential constitutive elements of ecclesial life are present."[14]

For all the local churches to be together in communion, the one visible communion God wills, it is required that all the essential constitutive elements of ecclesial communion are present and mutually recognized in each of them. Thus the visible communion between these churches is complete and their ministers are in communion with each other. This does not necessitate precisely the same canonical ordering; diversity of canonical structure is part of the acceptable diversity which enriches the one communion of all the churches.

The constitutive elements essential for the visible communion of the Church are derived from and subordinate to the common confession of Jesus Christ as Lord. In the picture of the Jerusalem church in the Acts of the Apostles, we can already see it emerging from certain necessary elements of ecclesial communion which must be present in the Church in every age. Communion ecclesiology represents an attempt to move beyond the merely juridical and institutional understanding by emphasizing the mystical, sacramental and historical dimension of

[14] See *Report Of The Roman Catholic-Old Catholic Dialogue Commission*, May 2009

the church. It focuses on relationships, whether among the persons of the trinity, among human beings and God, among the members of the communion of saints, among members of the parish or among Bishops dispersed throughout the world. It emphasizes the dynamic display between the church universal and between the local churches. Communion ecclesiology stresses that the church is not simply the receiver of revelation, but as the mystical body of Christ is bound up with revelation itself. When a person becomes a Christian, he doesn't just join a local church because it's a good habit for growing in spiritual maturity. He joins a local church because it's the expression of what Christ has made him, a member of the body of Christ. Being united to Christ means being united to every Christian. But that universal union must be given a living, breathing existence in a local church. Sometimes theologians refer to a distinction between the universal church and the local church. Other than a few references to the universal church, most references to the church in the New Testament are to local churches, as when Paul writes, to the church of God in Corinth or to the churches in Galatia.

Except for the rarest of circumstances, a true Christian builds his life into the lives of other believers through the concrete fellowship of a local church. He knows he has not yet arrived. He's still fallen and needs the accountability and instruction of that local body of people called the church. And they need him.

As we gather to worship God and exercise love and good deeds toward one another, we demonstrate in real life the fact that God has reconciled us to himself and to one another. We demonstrate to the world that we have been changed, not primarily because we memorize Bible verses, pray before meals, tithe a portion of our income, and listen to Christian radio stations, but because we increasingly show a willingness to put up with, to forgive, and even to love a bunch of fellow sinners.

We cannot demonstrate love, joy, peace, patience or kindness sitting all by ourselves as an island. No, we demonstrate it when the people we have committed to loving give us good reasons not to love them, but we do it anyway. Together we can display the gospel of Jesus Christ in a way we just can't by ourselves.

2.7 CHURCH AS A COMMUNION IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament reflects different dimensions of communion as experienced in the life of the Church in apostolic times. At the center of this communion is life with the Father, through Christ, in the Spirit. "Through the sending of his Son the living God has revealed that love is at the heart of the divine life."[15] Those who abide in love abide in God and God in them; if we, in communion with him love one another, he abides in us and his love is perfected in us. Through love God communicates his life. He causes those who accept the light of the truth revealed in Christ rather than the darkness of this world to become his children. This is the most profound communion possible for any of his creatures. "It is a community which suffers with Christ in anticipation of the revelation of his glory."[16]

Those who are in communion participate in one another's joys and sorrows; they serve one another in love and share together to meet the needs of one another and of the community as a whole. There is a mutual giving and receiving of spiritual and material gifts, not only between individuals but also between communities, on the basis of a fellowship that already exists in Christ. The integrity and building up of that fellowship requires appropriate structure, order and discipline.

[15] *Australian eJournal of Theology*, 5 August 2005, 1
[16] *Secondary Anglican/Roman Catholic International Commission.* Chapter 1 paragraph 15

Communion will reach its fulfillment when God will be all in all. It is the will of God for the whole creation that all things should be brought to ultimate unity and communion in Christ. Already in the New Testament these different dimensions of communion are discernible, striving towards their ever more faithful realization.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PRACTICUM (EXPERIENCE)

3.0 Introduction.

This chapter will explain and analyze the personal practical experience in St Massimo Parish, Meru Diocese. The practicum took a period of five months of insertion. The researcher travelled from Nairobi to Meru and back every weekend, covering a distance of four hundred and forty kilometers. This was necessitated by the fact that the researcher wanted this particular study to be relevant to his local community and Church after his university studies. There are eleven Small Christian Communities in St Massimo centre. They include, Blessed Allamano, St Ann, St Charles Lwanga, St Daniel, St Dominic, St. Joseph, St. Lucy, St. Mary, St Martin, St. Patrick and St. Peter. Each and every community was visited by the researcher, and though each was unique in its own way of doing things, there were many common elements experienced in all. This chapter will also look at the social- cultural set up of the parish in reference to the local community. (The Meru community is known to be very strict and conservative with their culture and tradition). Another factor that will be on focus in this chapter is the level of participation, the activities performed in these communities and the number of men, women, youth and the children who attend weekly prayers and Bible sharing. The question of how active they are during weekly meetings will be explained. Finally, this chapter will analyze and come up with common challenges experienced from all the Small Christian Communities.

3.1 INSERTION.

The insertion started in December 2015 when the researcher met the Parish Priest of St. Massimo parish, Fr. Bernard Njeru. The Parish Priest accepted the request of doing the practicum in his parish. He was very positive and of great support towards the practicum during the whole period at St. Massimo. The parish priest is assisted by two younger priests, Fr Hezron and Fr. Francis. Fr Francis is the priest in charge of Small Christian Communities in the Parish. The following week, Fr. Francis called an urgent meeting of all the leaders and representatives of the Small Christian Communities in the parish hall. The purpose of the meeting was to introduce the researcher and come up with a program of the visits. The researcher introduced himself to the representatives and explained the purpose of his visit and his presence in their midst until when he completes his practicum. The leaders were very happy and excited to welcome the researcher in their midst every Friday evening. They exchanged their phone and Email contacts for proper coordination and communication.

At St. Massimo, all the eleven Small Christian Communities hold their weekly meetings and Bible sharing on Friday evenings, on the same day and the same time. This means that the researcher would be able to visit only one Small Christian Community every week.

3.2 THE PARISH SOCIAL-ECONOMIC SET UP.

St Massimo Parish was started in the year 2006. It is run by diocesan priests with Fr. Bernard as the first parish priest. It is situated within Mikinduri shopping centre. Ninety nine percent of the parishioners are local people (The Ameru of Kenya). The rest, (a small number) are from other communities. Since it is within the shopping centre, some members are business people though the majority of them are farmers. The major cash crop of this particular area is miraa. Miraa is a stimulant plant grown in Meru County along Nyambene hills. Some countries and people refer to

it as a drug. But to the local community, it is a cash crop and also an important plant that the local Meru people place great cultural value on. In fact, traditionally, it was part of the dowry presented before marriage. This particular plant is very sensitive to the weather of the day. It must be harvested either early in the morning or evening when it is still cool; otherwise the value goes down if it weathers before it is delivered. It is central to the economy and upkeep of the local people. This dictates the value of timing and length of the weekly Small Christian Community's prayer meetings.

Meru people are known to be quite traditional and conservative with their culture. Traditionally, men do not intermingle with women and children in public. Men deal with their own affairs in private. This attitude has negatively contributed greatly to the number of men who attend to the weekly SCC meetings. As a matter of fact, the introduction of Christianity has greatly liberated the local community especially women and children.

3.3 EDUCATION

Everyone in this part of Meru feels grateful to the church for her contribution towards education. Almost all the schools in this region were started by the church but later taken over by the government. Many senior and educated people in the government today, who come from this community, were educated and assisted by the church. Majority of the local people hold the church with great respect and esteem. Many children now go to public primary schools. They can clearly speak, read and write using either English, Swahili or the local language (kimeru). Very few older people know how to read or write. Majority are illiterate. The language mostly used in the SCC is Kimeru, the local language. Luckily enough, there is a Bible version written in the local language.

3.4 LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION

According to the practical experience from the eleven Small Christian Communities at St. Massimo, the number of those who participate in the weekly prayer days is low. St. Massimo has very large SCCs consisting of more than fifty families, but few people (less than twenty) turn up for prayers and Bible sharing every week. Majority of those who turn up are women who make up to around eighty percent. This number is followed by children with about ten percent. Men and the youth are the minority with the remaining ten percent. This prompted the researcher to conduct some interviews with different people including the Parish priest, Fr. Bernard, the senior catechist, Mr. Tarcisio and an active SCC leader, Dr. Simon. The researcher had also an opportunity of meeting the Bishop of Meru Rt. Rev. Salesius Mugambi in his office in presence of Fr. Joseph Healey. The following observations came up.

1. According to Mr. Tarcisio, an elderly catechist, men from this region will always feel uncomfortable sitting and talking in public in the presence of women and children. This goes against the tradition and culture of the local community.
2. Since the majority of the older people are illiterate, they feel shy when time comes for Bible sharing. The community regards men as wise and know it all whether educated or illiterate, hence men would feel embarrassed and belittled sharing among women and children about the Bible, which sometimes they do not understand.
3. The young people feel out of place and bored during the weekly SCC gatherings. Fr. Francis, the priest in charge of both the youth and Small Christian Communities in St. Massimo parish, had a very strong proposal to have the youth attend their SCC meetings

alone without men and women in their presence. They feel shy talking in the presence of their parents, “This is against their culture” said Fr. Francis.

4. Social economic set up is also a strong factor that came up. Majority of the people around St. Massimo parish are miraa farmers. Due to the sensitivity of this plant, it is supposed to be harvested either early in the morning or in the evening while it is still cool. The harvest losses market value in case it withers after harvest in the local tropical weather. Dr. Simon, who is a miraa farmer and a SCC leader observed that majority of Christians are always busy harvesting miraa in their farms during the SCC prayer and meeting time.
5. Tribalism and clanism. When we visited the bishop of Meru in his office and asked him his views on the challenges affecting the growth of Small Christian Communities in the diocese, he pointed out at the two (clanism and tribalism) as some of the worst factors. These are very strong internal inclinations in Africa and especially with its people. Christians would feel comfortable joining people from their own tribe or clan for prayers and Bible sharing. People mostly feel obliged to attend the SCC activities in homes of those whom they feel they are related to, either by tribe or clan. Some of them have to travel long distances, many kilometers just to join their clansmen in prayer, Bible sharing and other SCC activities
6. Lack of interest and motivation from the local clergy. The researcher had an experience and observation that few priests attend SCC meetings within their parishes. They also talk and preach less about the significance of the same. The priests will show interest with Small Christian Communities only when asking for money or financial support from the Christian members.

3.5 Activities performed in the SCC’s in St. Massimo

When the Small Christian Community concept was introduced in Meru diocese, it came within the 'Lumko' approach. This is the seven steps approach in the sharing of the word of God which involves the following.

3.6. The Seven Steps

1. **Invite**
    - We remind ourselves that the Risen Lord is with us.
    - Someone invites Jesus in a prayer and welcome him our midst.

2. **Read**
    - We open our Bible to Chapter: …. (When all have found the chapter)
    - Someone reads the selected book, chapter and the verses.

3. **View with Wonder**
    - We read out words or short phrases, read them aloud prayerfully and repeat them three times.

      (The silence after each repetition should be long enough for us to repeat the same word once or twice in our hearts.)
    - Afterwards someone reads the same text again (from a different version).

4. **Listen**

- We keep silence for a few minutes and allow God to speak to us.

5. **Share**

    - We then share the words that have touched us personally.
    - We do not discuss any contribution, even though some may not share personally but comment instead, (Afterwards the group may choose a Word of Life)
    - Afterwards we choose a word from the text that shall be our "Word of Life" for the coming week or month?

6. **Plan for action**

    - Now we discuss any task which our group is called to do in our neighborhood or Parish.
    - Report on the previous task.
    - What new tasks need to be done?

      WHO will do WHAT and WHEN?

      (In Step 6 we may also share some examples of how we have applied the "Word of Life" in certain situations of daily life.)

7. **Pray**

    - Anyone who wishes may pray spontaneously.
    - (Afterwards) We end with a prayer or a hymn which everyone knows.

For those who attend the Small Christian Community meetings, they always come up with very good, brilliant, Christian and relevant tasks to do. The researcher attended, participated and witnessed the following as a case study and came up with the following report and assessment from St. Martin Small Christian Community in St. Massimo parish. The event took place on 12th February 2016. The researcher used the See, Judge and Act formula in this engagement with an eye on the challenges experienced in St. Martin SCC. Towards the end, the researcher analyzed his reflection on the activities of Small Christian Communities in the parishes.

Case Study

3.7.0 Small Christian Communities as the base for Charity, Prayer and Mercy

3.7.1 See

I attended a Small Christian Community that was in a rural set up. We had our meeting as a normal weekly gathering.

On Friday 12th February, 2016, the small Christian community of St. Martin in St. Massimo Parish, Meru Diocese, Kenya, decided to have their normal weekly gathering at a home of mama Cecilia, an elderly lady who used to be a very active member of the Church and Jumuyia (SCC). She is now elderly and cannot do much by herself. I joined the fifteen members of St. Martin as we gathered at the homestead of mama Cecilia. Our meeting started at 4.15 pm. The leader of the Jumuyia took us through the seven steps very slowly and prayerfully. I realized that every

member of the community had carried with himself or herself a small package. Our meeting started with a word of prayer led by a lady member. A very unique thing within this particular meeting was that instead of reading the Gospel of the coming Sunday as it is usually done, the leader of the jumuyia opted to come up with a small verse from 1 John 3:16 which says, "The way we came to understand love was that, He laid down His life for us. We too must lay down our lives for our brothers and Sisters".

After a very fruitful sharing of the word of God together with prayers, the members were reminded about the agreement of the previous week on the task they were to undertake as they visit mama Cecilia. Therefore before the final hymn and prayer, each member was assigned a duty within the compound of mama Cecilia. The women embarked on the cleaning of the household, cleaning of her dirty clothes and household utensils. I joined the men in clearing her external compound since it was very bushy. We also repaired her house which was leaking during the rainy season. The children were busy cutting and arranging firewood for mama Cecilia. For almost an hour, each member was active doing something. After the successful work, we gathered again around the clean compound of mama Cecilia and every member, "mwanajumuyia", came up with the things they had carried for her. There was a lot of foodstuff and clothing brought for her.

The touchy moment happened when Mama Cecilia was asked to speak to the SCC members. She was overcome by emotions, she was over joyous and she started shedding tears. Most of the member could not hold back their tears too. She thanked all the members of St Martin Small Christian Community for their generosity, their worthy time and prayers. This is the time it dawned unto me that "Jumuyias" (SCC), are the perfect base for charity, prayer and mercy. It is in such small units that people know one other and particularly know the needs of each member.

Prayers too become more relevant when people understand one another. They will pray for things that touch them. They will thank God for things that they have all experienced as a community in their neighborhood. Small Christian Communities also encourage those members who do not know how to pray or are lazy to embrace the spirit of prayer. Majority of those who were shy and could not lead a prayer in public can now do it very comfortably. Thanks to "Jumuyias" (SCC).

As we came to the end of our weekly normal gathering, every member was filled with a spirit of joy and fulfillment. Our leader had some few words of encouragement for us, "As we go back to our homes, let us remember those among us who need our help. We have many poor and elderly people amongst us. For us here today we have not only read the word of God, but truly lived it". These were very strong words and they touched our hearts. This being the period of Lent, we were all called to be keepers of our brothers and sisters.

3.7.2 Judge

The attendance was not very encouraging. The number of attendance was not corresponding with the number of families who belong to St Martin Small Christian Community. At the same time, the number of men and the youth was very low. Men did not participate in the sharing of the word; only the SCC leader did it. This was attributed to the cultural inclination where men never speak in presence of women and children.

3.7.3 Act

If our clergy could involve themselves more fully to the activities of Small Christian Communities, a great change would be achieved especially in changing the mindset of the local people on the negative attitude of our culture. There is no sin praying together as a group or a family. Men should stop feeling out of place in presence of women and children. I resolved to meet the priests at St Massimo and encourage them to attend and engage the Christians on the positive approach to Small Christian Communities as a new way of being the Church.

3.7.4 Challenges

The following challenges were experienced.

1. The number of active members was low.
2. Men and the youth rarely attend Small Christian Communities.
3. Cultural or traditional norms affect the activities of Small Christian Communities. Some groups of people, especially men shy off from the sharing because of the presence of women and children.
4. Absence or lack of interest from the local clergy.

3.7.5 Reflection

Majority of our Christians are very generous and ready to go a further mile in being sensitive to the needs of others and following the call of Christ if only they can be encouraged and motivated. It was very good and inspiring to see people sacrifice their time and energy coming together and helping an old poor member of their jumuyia (SCC).

It is really encouraging that majority of our people are now embracing Small Christian Communities in their parishes. This is the way to go for the church. This is the future of our church if we are to remain relevant and responsive to our Christian call of being charitable, merciful and prayerful. It is always fulfilling to note that we belong somewhere and that evangelization is not the work of a few persons or the clergy. Every member of the small Christian community has a responsibility to make sure that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is felt throughout the world, starting with our neighborhood. Good leadership also stems from the Small Christian Community. The spirit of service to others and self denial comes out more clearly in the "Jumuyias" (SCC). We do not necessarily need to be rich to be charitable, merciful or prayerful

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 Theological Reflection

4.1 Introduction

After a successful pastoral experience (practicum) at St. Massimo parish, this chapter presents a theological reflection where the researcher presents an evaluation with an eye of faith as seen in the scriptures and the teaching of the Church. The pastoral solutions suggested are practical and human, but everything should be looked at in the light of the Gospel. Gospel values should always be upheld at all levels. As Fr. Paul Bere, SJ, says, "In the Small Christian Communities, Christians learn to listen to the voice of God through the unfolding of the historical events of their lives". Prayer and dialogue is also encouraged in the daily operations of our Small Christian Communities.

4.2 New Model of Church

At Tangaza University College, the class of 2016 on Small Christian Communities, Fr. Joe Healey, introduced a concept that majority of us had never heard before. He said that Small Christian Community is the new model of the church. This took most of us by surprise, but by the end of the lesson it became clear to us all how important and practical the concept is real. The activities that take place in the weekly SCC meetings manifest the New Way of Being the Church. Just as in the book of Acts of the Apostles, new churches were continually being founded. By faith in Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit the church can be a vibrant agent for change. As we face new problems and challenges in our Small Christian Communities, Acts of the Apostles gives important remedies for facing and solving them.

The concept, 'New Model of Church' can be manifested in the following ways:

4.3 Encouragement and Participation in the Sacraments

Jesus instituted the seven sacraments of the new law. These sacraments touch all the stages and all important moments of Christian's life of faith. Indeed Africans are known to celebrate life in all stages; hence celebration of these sacraments in the Small Christian Community level is very relevant. *Divine consortium naturae*, by Paul V1 says, "The sharing in the divine nature given to men through the grace of Christ bears a certain likeness to the origin, development and nourishing of natural life. The faithful are born anew by Baptism, strengthened by the sacrament of Confirmation, and receive in the Eucharist the food of eternal life. By means of these sacraments of Christian initiation, they thus receive in increasing measure the treasures of the divine life and advance towards the perfection of charity."

In the SCC set up, the members are expected to encourage and motivate one other in embracing and receiving the sacraments. Since they know and understand one another in their neighborhood, SCC members are better placed in approaching and bringing forward all those in need of the sacraments.

As one of the pastoral solution in the growth of SCCs, the idea of participation is very much encouraged. This clearly comes up when the Small Christian Community Members take a step in organizing and planning these sacraments. In the African spirit of community, every member feels obliged to participate in the whole process. In the early church, "Believers continued to meet together every day in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their numbers". (Acts 2:47 – 48) SCC carries this spirit of togetherness in their weekly meetings.

4.4 Reading and Appreciating the Word of God

Catholic Christians were known to be conservative and poor Bible readers, but not any longer. With the introduction of the Small Christian Communities in our parishes, the Catholic Christians can now appreciate the weekly Bible sharing in their midst. No wonder as Fr. Healey puts it, "They are called Lectionary-Based Small Christian Communities, meaning they use the Gospel of the following Sunday following the three year Lectionary Cycle".

The SCCs at St. Massimo have graduated in the aspect of Bible sharing. They use the 'Lumko' formula of the seven steps. It is fortunate that the Bible translation in the local language is used. A good number of members only understand the local language. This has helped many to understand and appreciate the word of God. Many people's lives have been transformed through the word of God. "The fidelity of the baptized is a primordial condition for the proclamation of the Gospel and for the Church's mission in the world". (CCC-2044) Majority of Catholics are now happy and appreciate reading the Bible. Through sharing on how it touches each member, they have come to learn how to connect and apply the Gospel to their everyday life. The Bible is now relevant. Thanks to the introduction of Small Christian Communities.

By placing the Bible in a central point and lighting a candle beside it, the presence of God in their midst is experienced as Jesus said, "For where two or three come together in my name, there I am with them" (Mt. 18:20).

4.5 SCC as Centre of Evangelization

Whoever loves God, fears Him and always strive to do what is good, God welcomes him or her. Every follower of Christ, by the virtue of baptism is obliged to preach the good news both through word and deeds. As the Vatican Council 11 says, "The baptized, by regeneration and the

anointing of the Holy Spirit, are consecrated as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, in order that through all those works which are those of a Christian man, they may offer spiritual sacrifices and proclaim the power of Him who have called them out of darkness into His marvelous light" (LG 10)

In the spirit of Small Christian Communities, every member realizes that it is their responsibility to evangelize. Praying together and encouraging those who do not know how to pray and mostly shy off; offering corrections and reminding each other of our Christian call and obligations; being sensitive and assisting one another in different situations, is the key call to every SCC. Since people know one another well in their neighborhood, it becomes easier even to know those who have left the church or are undergoing any kind of challenges, including sickness, stress or discouragement in life. Those who require various sacraments are easily noticeable within the Small Christian Community's environment. The Bible calls each of us not to be like Cain who claimed not to be his brothers' keeper (Gen. 4:9). Selfishness has no place in the SCC

Jesus commanded all his followers to go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything He commanded. "And surely I am with you always to the very end of the age", said Jesus. (Mt. 28:20). SCCs fulfill this commandment and anyone who goes against this does not qualify to be a member. At St. Massimo, the members of St. Peter Small Christian Community made good plans for baptism of two of their little children. They organized a very good celebration where all members contributed some amount of money for the occasion. Members of other SCCs within the parish were also invited to witness. A lot of food and drinks were provided after the baptism celebration. Everyone was happy and the spirit of communal evangelization was really felt.

In Antioch, “Barnabas and Saul meet with the church for the whole year, teaching a great number of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch”. (Acts 11:26) Just as the early believers preached, prayed and lived a good community life, the modern Small Christian Communities should borrow a leaf and become centers of evangelization within the parish. People admired the community of Antioch and because of their love for Christ and His teaching they were called Christians for the first time. At St. Massimo parish, the SCC of Blessed Allamano which is situated within the market place has received many new members especially from other denominations within the locality. Local market people admire their dedication, prayer life and charitable spirit especially for the needy. Africans are generally generous and they are easily touched and they admire any community that preach and exercise love and charity. SCCs are the best places for this exercise.

4.6 Leadership in the Church through the Spirit of SCC

“For many, the word leadership connotes power, authority, honour, prestige, or personal advantage. That is not Christian leadership”. (Anthony D’Souza in his book on “LEADERSHIP”) From the example of Jesus himself, though he was a God, he humbled himself and became a servant even to the point of death. Jesus says, “Whoever wishes to be first among you, shall be your servant, even as the son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt 20:27). Leadership in the SCCs should always be associated with service. At St. Massimo parish just like majority of other parishes in the Catholic Church especially in African rural set up, the clergy are regarded in very high esteem. They are seen as lords and not servants. The Catholic Church is known to be very structural and

hierarchical .This posses a great threat to the spirit of service in leadership. Fr. Healey emphasized to the SCC class of 2016 at Tangaza that the clergy and religious are no longer the bosses within the Small Christian Communities, but rather, the Christian members are. Karl Rahner, SJ, in *The Shape of the Church to Come* says, "The church in the future will be one built from below by basic communities as a result of free initiative and association. We should make every effort not to hold up this development, but to promote it on the right lines."

As it is recommended in this Thesis, the Church leadership should stem from the SCCs. A diocese like Nairobi gives a very good example of how leadership flows from the SCCs to the highest office. In Nairobi, diocesan pastoral leadership elections start from the SCC level. In the diocese of Meru where St. Massimo is situated, this procedure is not followed. The consequence of this deficiency is experienced where the top leadership in the parish pastoral council does not attend Small Christian Community meetings. Most often, our clergy and pastoral council leadership do not understand the servant spirit of leadership proclaimed in the SCCs. They do not feel obliged since they were not elected through the SCC procedure. Our bishops and parish priests should see to it that all Church leadership stem from the local Small Christian Communities.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHALLENGES IN THE GROWTH OF SMALL CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES AT ST. MASSIMO PARISH

5.0 Challenges

5.1 Poor Attendance. This was the most common and serious challenge noticeable in St. Massimo. In all the eleven Small Christian Community visited by the researcher, all the SCC leaders were complaining of the absence of their members. Very few people attend the meetings and Bible sharing. Out of the over fifty families in each SCC, only an average of ten people attend the weekly meetings. Men are the worst absentees followed by the youth. Women are always the majority in attendance. This tendency has discouraged many other active members and slowed down the activities of the SCC in the parish.

5.2 Lateness. The researcher together with Fr. Joseph Healey attended a two day workshop for all the diocesan SCC leaders at St. Michael retreat center. This seminar was organized by the diocesan SCC coordinator, Fr. Lawrence. Lateness was singled out as one of the worst challenge in the growth of SCC in all the parishes in Meru diocese. This was the same case in St. Massimo. Many people always attend the SCC activities as late as one or two hours. The consequences are enormous. First, this action discourages those who always keep time. They are forced to wait for hours before other members arrive for them to start any activity. Secondly, it pushes the activities of the SCC forward creating a possibility of some not being done on time. Thirdly, since majority of those who attend are women, they are mostly disadvantaged because, culturally they are the ones who are supposed to prepare dinner for their families back home. Very often, the families take their dinner late. Finally, there has been a danger of family disagreements and at times resulted to separation. This happens when the SCC activities start and end late. The situation forces the wife to arrive home late. Mostly the husband demands an explanation and an atmosphere of suspicion creeps in.

5.3 Clanism and Ethnicity. Africans are known to be very tribal and ethnically inclined. In St. Massimo, just like other parishes, people tend to move long distances to join their tribal kin for prayers and other SCC activities. A Small Christian Community ceases to be a neighborhood activity but turns up to be an ethnic gathering. This has discouraged many potential members especially those from the minority tribe or clan. The researcher, accompanied by his supervisor, Fr. Joseph Healey visited the bishop of Meru, Salesius Mugambi in his office. As he shared his view on the challenges in the growth of SCC in Meru diocese, the bishop mentioned clanism as one of the big stumbling blocks. There are some Christians at this age who still feel uncomfortable joining people from a different clan.

5.4 Large Number of Families that form a Small Christian Community. One unique situation at St. Massimo parish in regard to SCC is that, all the eleven communities hold more than fifty families. This defeat the fact of these SCC being referred to as small since they are already too large. When the researcher inquired from the Parish priest about the cause or etymology of this abnormality, the answer given was that this happened due to ignorance from both the clergy and the SCC leaders. Due to this challenge, members have to walk very long distances to attend the prayer meetings. Some walk for about four kilometers to be able to participate in the SCC activities. This is one big cause of lateness in the prayer meetings and activities. This situation also contributes to the fact that members do not know and understand each other properly as per the expectation in the SCC. The notion of neighborhood is ignored.

5.5 Lack of Interest from the Clergy and other Church Leaders. Unfortunately, majority of the clergy today show very minimal interest in regard to SCC prayers and

activities. Some of the clergy are seen in the weekly SCC prayer meetings only when they are coming to pass a certain announcement or asking for money from the members. According to the senior catechist of St. Massimo, Mr. Tarcisio, the presence of the clergy in the weekly meetings would greatly uplift the spirit and morale of the parishioners. The negative attitude of the clergy flows down to church pastoral council leaders. In St. Massimo parish for example, very few parish pastoral council leaders attend the SCC meetings. This is because none of them was elected through the Small Christian Communities; they therefore do not realize the value of belonging. Another cause of lack of interest according to Mr. Simon, a SCC leader, is that during the time of PPC elections within the parish, Christians tend to elect rich individuals who are mostly busy business people. Unfortunately, they tend to dedicate their time and energy on the prosperity of their business empire.

Actually, when the common lay men, women and children see and notice the absence and lack of interest from their leaders, they get discouraged and loose morale to continue. In the African context, leaders are viewed with very high esteem and respect. They are the light and model of the people and society. The parishioners, especially the children and the youth tend to copy their way of life. When the leaders view a certain aspect of life negatively, the subjects take it up very easily. It is really sad that our leaders have not taken the concept of Small Christian Communities with the seriousness it deserves. They have failed to lead and give good example to their subjects.

5.6 The Money Factor. Every time the idea of money came up during the weekly prayer meetings, it was clearly noticeable that majority of the member were not comfortable. Today, it seems as an agreeable method from the Church authority that every church

money contribution should be channeled through the Small Christian Communities. There are many contributions in the Church today (every week) to the extent that Christian feels as though the idea of church taxation has come back. Some of the major contributions are parish projects, clergy upkeep and Diocesan self reliance money. These have become a big challenge to the common Christians and majority of them have opted to skip weekly prayer meetings especially if they do not have money to contribute. Money factor has negatively affected the growth of Small Christian Communities in our parishes. When the researcher interviewed Dr. Simon, a SCC leader of Blessed Joseph Allamano, he expressed his strong reservations on the frequency at which money is demanded from members during the weekly SCC prayer meetings. This has affected him too as a leader. He is always in a dilemma, either to ask for money or ignore the order from the parish priest and the pastoral council. Very often, this created a collision. His suggestion was that other ways of asking money from the Christian should be invented or introduced so that the prayer day can be spared purposely for spiritual growth and nourishment.

CHAPTER SIX

6.0 PASTORAL SOLUTIONS

6.1 Organize Regular Seminars and Workshop for SCC Leaders and Clergy

It is often said that knowledge is power. Actually the absence of the same is weakness. Our people, starting with the clergy and religious require proper knowledge on SCCs. If possible, the topic or subject on Small Christian Communities should be introduced and made mandatory in the seminary formation for all the candidates aspiring for ordination. There is a lot of emphasis in the seminary today about Theological concepts, but giving little attention to the practical pastoral experience to the candidates for priestly ordination. The same strong emphasis should be extended to all the religious formation houses and institutions, both for men and women. Our religious sisters and brothers should learn and be involved at the grass root level with all SCC activities.

The concept of a new time of the church as "new moment" at the beginning of this third millennium came up during the AMECEA meeting of bishops at their Fourteenth Plenary Assembly in Dar es Salaam in July 2002. The bishops renewed their confidence in SCCs and gave to them an indispensable role in the new and deeper evangelization in Africa. The bishops confirmed the SCCs as a key pastoral option. This clearly manifests the important role the SCCs play in the promotion of evangelization in our parishes. The clergy should therefore heed the bishops' call and assist in strengthening of the SCCs in their respective parishes. Continuous seminars should also be extended to the SCC leaders and members. Every parish should have a number of "TOTs" (Training of Trainers) to facilitate the ongoing training.

6.2 Control and Regulate Money Contributions in SCCs

For the purpose of evangelization, every SCC makes some contributions for their own activities. The money collected is mostly used to help the needy, facilitate special activities like celebrations in the SCCs and other parish needs.

The biggest challenge however in this case, is the frequency and demand of money from SCC members each and every week during the prayer meetings. Majority of SCC leaders demand these weekly contributions and go to an extent of threatening those who fail to contribute. A proper, convenient and less tedious method should be sought so as to minimize the rate of money factor in the weekly prayer meetings. The clergy and SCC leaders should draw a formula that will not discourage or hurt the members. A proposal was made of conducting one major annual fundraising in each SCC so that members can be eased from weekly contributions. Each and every SCC should also be given an opportunity to discuss and come up the best way of collecting money amongst them. This is because they know and understand one another and their economic strength in the neighborhood.

Threats should completely be avoided in the SCC prayer meetings. Leaders should use good, sober and prudent language especially to those without money. The leaders should try to encourage those who are economically disadvantaged so that they may feel appreciated and loved in the community despite their poverty and failure to give weekly contributions.

6.3 Encourage Family Values including Praying Together

When the former Holy Father, St John Paul 11 came to Kenya for the inauguration of the African Synod in 1995, he strongly applauded Africa as a continent of the family. Africans have strong family values, therefore it becomes easier for the clergy and the SCC leaders to introduce teach and encourage this concept with ease. Everyone should feel free and comfortable sharing and

praying the Gospel as a Christian community within the neighborhood. Christianity has enlightened us that we all belong to one community and family where Christ is the uniting figure. Our community members should be made aware that praying together enhances family and Christian values as it is commonly said that a family that prays together, lives together.

6.4 Punctuality and Active Participation

Punctuality has been one of the greatest challenges in the SCC prayer meetings. In all the eleven Small Christian Communities visited by the researcher in St. Massimo parish, lateness was ranked as the most discouraging cause of SCC failures. People should be encouraged to keep time during SCC meetings and prayer days. Starting and ending on time is of great significance. SCC leaders should also be discouraged from waiting for more people to arrive before they start the meetings. Members should be involved in looking for solutions and suggesting ways and methods of overcoming lateness in all SCC activitites.

The SCC leaders should also encourage everyone to actively participate in the meetings. Try to involve the passive and shy members as much as possible. Poor participation discourages the active members and makes the meetings boring and monotonous.

6.5 Introduce Small Christian Communities in Schools, Colleges and Parish Youth Organizations

The young people of today are very sensitive and dynamic. They wish to do their things in their own unique way. This does not mean that they should be left alone, no. They should be guided in a good Christian way of life. Where Small Christian Communities are well introduced to the young people, they usually respond very positively. Where possible, all schools and colleges with Catholic students should be encouraged to introduce Small Christian Communities in their

midst. In the parishes, the parish priests and SCC leaders should organize the youth to form Youth Small Christian Communities.

6.6 Every Diocese and Parish should have a Central SCC Coordination Plan

For proper management and coordination of all SCC activities, the bishops of every diocese and the parish priests of every parish in consultation with SCC leaders should create a central coordinator who will be properly facilitated for proper coordination of all diocesan and parish activities. Small Christian Communities, as a new way of being the Church is very central to all pastoral activities. Proper coordination is vital.

6.7 Regulate the Number of Members in Each Small Christian Community

Majority of SCC in the parishes have large number of members. This makes it hard for some of them to travel long distances and participate efficiently. These numbers should be regulated whereby the recommended number of twelve families per SCC should be emphasized. Proper education and training should be offered to all SCC leaders on this particular issue.

6.8 Leadership and Pastoral Functions Should Stem from SCC.

All parish and diocesan leadership should stem from SCC. No leader should be installed in any office without either a recommendation or approval from the local Small Christian Community. At the same time, every pastoral function, either private or communal should evolve around the local SCC. This includes reception or administration of sacraments and sacramentals like funerals.

CONCLUSION

The intention of the researcher in this project was to try and understand the meaning of Small Christian Communities as a new model of being the Church. To achieve this purpose, the researcher consulted many sources which included Church documents especially Vatican Council 11, in particular, the Lumen Gentium. Different books and authors were also consulted. Since it is not possible to get solutions for anything without first getting to know the challenges, the researcher identified many different challenges that hinder the growth of Small Christian Communities especially in St. Massimo parish, Meru Diocese. In order to get proper and extensive solutions to the identified challenges, the researcher went further to conduct interviews with different people including the bishop of Meru, the clergy, senior catechist and the community members.

For our Church to be relevant and effective in this 21st century, the concept of Small Christian Communities in our parishes is inevitable. A great German theologian, Karl Rahner postulates in *The Shape of the Church to come,* "The church in the future will be one built from below by basic communities as a result of free initiative and association. We should make every effort not to hold up this development, but to promote it and direct it on the right lines." It is only within the Small Christian Communities that we shall be able to live and practice the true Christian faith and its values. Christians should move further from only reading the bible and trying to interpret it ,to living a live that is expressed in that bible.

Small Christian Communities give the community members an opportunity to exercise and practice the Christian values learnt from the Holy Scripture. It is a kind of a continuous catechesis and self evangelization where all the members are involved. This is the place where inactive Catholic Christians are encouraged to learn and live a responsible life in accordance

with Christ teaching. This involves expressing and practicing love through service to the less fortunate, praying together and sharing goods through charity.

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