

Young People and Small Christian Communities: Case Study of Nkoroi Catholic Parish, Ngong Diocese, Kenya

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The Catholic Church, especially the African Church, is a bastion for the Small Christian Communities (SCCs). As more than just a consequence of putting the Second Vatican Council's (1962–65) ecclesiology into practice, the Small Christian Communities, or (Jumuiya, as used in Kenya and Tanzania) developed particularly in Eastern Africa, in the "Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa" (AMECEA) countries.

Therefore, in this particular way, the Small Christian Communities serve as the light of the local churches, particularly in Kenya, where it has established itself. These SCCs gather people from a particular location, get to know one another, develop their faith together, and then transfer their perspective to a better elevation that constitutes a Church, making them a church at its most basic level.

In essence, I call the Catholic Church home. I have been a member of the Nkoroi Catholic Parish since it was an outstation. I must admit that from childhood, I have had the privilege of participating and serving in several groups within the church. One group that stood out for me and still stands out for me is the Small Christian Communities. Community and kinship are integral aspects of African culture. As with any other form of community in Africa, so should Small Christian Communities. However, it is particularly alarming considering the representation of different groups within the gatherings, particularly here in Nkoroi. The vast majority of its members are women. Men account for low participation, and the young people are barely there or sometimes absenting within the Small Christian Communities gathering. It is

contrary to the population representations in most settings. Even worse, outside or maybe some children under the age of 10, there are no young people of any age. So why are our young people present at church but absent from involvement in the activities of local Small Christian Communities?

I thus decided to seek opinions from a few members of my church in semi-formal questions to ascertain the precise nature of the issue. First, I became aware that even though I was actively trying to solve the problem, I was also a part of it. I couldn't be considered an active participant even if I occasionally attended Small Christian Communities gatherings and participated in the animating mass. I wanted to learn about the various viewpoints on the Small Christian Communities and perhaps provide some insight. Undoubtedly, we require new approaches and fresh inventiveness.

Questions of importance emerge immediately: To what locations do the young people gather when it's time for Christian fellowship? For what reason do they not take part in Small Christian Communities activities? Could it reflect those parents who forget to inform their children about these religious undertakings? Have other types of animators, such as priests, failed to persuade young people to participate in these communities in numbers? These inquiries collectively suggest that the practice of Small Christian Communities is exclusive to women and, by extension, something in which the young people have no business engaging.

To start with, one must be able to see the positive effects of SCCs on the community. Young people portray ignorance of what is happening in the local Small Christian Community groups. If we don't already frequent Small Christian Communities, how can the young people understand their significance?

Young people in today's society find it difficult to spend time with their parents because of their inherent curiosity and desire for experience. They are most at ease with others who are close to their age. As a result, they are free to express their thoughts and personal experiences on any subject. But when the young people go with their parents to SCCs gatherings, they frequently say they feel awkward and out of place since the meeting focuses on a more conventional kind of communication. The cause of young people not attending SCCs with their parents or older people is the generational divide.

Another problem is the location. There may be a general unease about visiting a Small Christian Community in some places where some young people are just starting life after school. Similarly, many worry that if they don't host or choose not to host on house visits, the response would be unfavorable, and most people are reluctant to disclose their living arrangements. Particularly when it comes to working, men and young people are battling fast social and economic transformation. Young people, particularly young men, lack the time and inclination to sit down for an extended period due to unemployment and an unpredictable economic imbalance.

We can't justly condemn the young people for being absent without admitting that most pastoral agents have failed in their ministry to the young people. Many young people who reject SCCs don't attend mass and may not be part of other church activities. Most young people need encouragement to keep the same degree of faith and passion for the Small Christian Communities as with other church activities is the pastoral agent's high job.

I organized a few young people as a reaction, and we planned to participate in the SCCs gatherings to express our ideas and perhaps find answers.

The solution was to encourage a welcoming feeling within the Small Christian Community. Most young people do not feel involved in the events of Small Christian Community gatherings. In essence, they portray that the activities of the Small Christian Communities are not impactful by either their presence or absence. They feel like spectators, on the outside looking in. However, if Small Christian Communities create roles that the young people would specifically serve within the SCCs, more young people would be inclined to participate. Most of them want to feel wanted and as if they are making a difference. Similarly, the older members of the SCCs should be open to trying things differently and let the young people take up leadership positions within the SCCs. What may seem ridiculous could be fun and re-invigorating for the whole group, for instance, a bible trivia proposal suggestion as part of competition within the group gatherings.

Creating separate Young People SCCs inside the parish is one easy solution to the age gap that has kept young people from attending SCCs alongside their older counterparts. In other words, it is the pastoral agent's responsibility to create awareness that young people gatherings consistently meetings should have bible teachings. As such, the young people could have a separate time to attend Small Christian Communities gathering that would be more convenient for those who cannot always find time within the designated SCCs gathering times. The SCCs are not to be confused with other young people events hosted by the parish. It means that the Young People SCCs gatherings should be within the rest of the activities in the parish. Otherwise, young people can show up from all across the parish, diluting the event as part of the meeting in the church.

Overall, this exercise was an eye-opener for myself and for the rest of the other young people who participated, the pastoral agents, and SCCs members. Young people have a zeal and

passion for the gospel but do not know where to start outside the young people group setup. While these suggestions may seem simplistic, sometimes a simple solution is just what a complex problem needs. I hope to conduct a similar exercise after a while and report with positive feedback. I am highly optimistic and look forward to a positive response.

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