



## The Lived Experience of Members and Leaders of Small Christian Communities; Trained Under LUMKO East Africa in Nairobi

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<b>Published Online:</b> <b>24 March 2025</b>	<p>On 5<sup>th</sup> October, 2024, at Subukia Shrine in the Catholic Diocese of Nakuru, Kenya, the annual National Prayer Day was celebrated. It was combined with the climax of AMECEA<sup>1</sup> celebrating Fifty (50) years since Small Christian Communities (SCCs)<sup>2</sup> were adopted as the Pastoral Priority for the region. The theme for the day was, "Journeying together as a family of God with Integrity through SCCs". The Eucharistic celebration was presided over by the chairperson of AMECEA, Chancellor of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa and alumni of LUMKO Pastoral workshops, Rt. Rev. Charles Kasonde of Zambia.</p> <p>Among those acknowledged were facilitators of LUMKO Pastoral workshops. who dutifully trained Pastoral Agents within AMECEA region for Thirty-Four (34) years. The researcher who is also a Pastoral Agent trainer under LUMKO, undertook to conduct a Phenomenological inquiry among LUMKO alumnus to mark this Golden Jubilee of SCCs. The main research questions were informed by phenomenology (a philosophy as well as a methodology in research), hence phrased in the following manner:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. In what ways do leaders of SCCs describe their experiences of being in their SCCs?</li><li>2. How do SCC leaders personally perceive their ability when using instructional communication skills in meetings?</li><li>3. Describe your personal experience in making decisions within your SCC?</li><li>4. In your experience, what strategies of empowering your SCC have been successful?</li></ol>
<b>Corresponding Author:</b> <b>Sr. Mulongo Jane Francisca IBVM</b>	An Interview Protocol was prepared, and administered to a small sample size, purposively selected. Thematic data analysis, interpretation and discussions were inductively done. Ethical considerations were adhered to. The conclusion and recommendations were made.

### CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background to the Study.

In their 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> plenary assembly, AMECEA bishops resolved that, SCCs are very instrumental in bringing the gospel down to the lives of people, hence they be given priority in subsequent years in Eastern Africa<sup>3</sup>. Consequently, the Parish Priests in the region created neighborhood groupings of their parishioners that became SCCs. What next? The only institution training lay pastoral agents at that time was the LUMKO<sup>4</sup> Missiological Institute owned by the South African Episcopal Conference of Bishops. Sr.

Ephigenia Gachiri IBVM, (an employee) then and catechist Joseph Waswa (student) at Gaba Pastoral Institute in Eldoret (current Gaba campus of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa) went to South Africa (1989-1991) for training. After graduation, they were mandated by their teachers (Bishop Fritz Lobinger and Fr. Oswald Hirmer) to spearhead LUMKO

<sup>1</sup> AMECEA (Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa).

<sup>2</sup> SCCs (Small Christian Communities).

<sup>3</sup><http://amecea.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/The-history-of-AMECEA.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> LUMKO (The name LUMKO belonged to the family that donated land for the Pastoral Centre, but the word *Ubulumko* in one of the South African languages means Wisdom, "*Sapientia*" in Latin and "*Hekima*" in Arabic and in Kiswahili. The name was retained by the institution because many gained divine wisdom from it.

Pastoral Programs in Eastern Africa. LUMKO workshops are now under the *Waumini* Pastoral Programs under KCCB.<sup>5</sup>

The content of LUMKO workshops is, “Pastoral Theology in Basic Ecclesiology”. It is meant for people with little formal theology and in some cases with little reading ability. Participants receive knowledge, skills and methodology of Gospel Sharing in SCCs, while the Holy Spirit does the rest through them. LUMKO workshops have been offered on-site (face-to-face) for a month each year since 1991 to date. Eligible participants of LUMKO workshops are pastoral agents, who can afford to pay half the cost of the workshop and be away from home for about a month.

## 1.2 Statement of the problem.

The United Nations (UN) Charter on Human Rights (1948), give all people, regardless of their backgrounds, the right to quality and holistic education. The Government of Kenya in turn recognizes the importance of education (including adult education) as a basic right and a tool for achieving Socio- Economic development<sup>6</sup>

SCCs consist of families'. Adults in these families would like to respond to the commissioning by Jesus Christ, “Go into all the world and proclaim the good news” (Mark 16:15). Unfortunately, many lack confidence, because they are not sufficiently equipped with knowledge, skills and methodology to enable them minister effectively in their neighborhoods. Many laities have not understood their ecclesiology (churchhood), hence they have not fully owned the church (Dulles, 1974). *Lumen Gentium* (#10), documents that, “all the baptized share in the priesthood of Christ”. Pope Francis in “*Instrumentum Laboris*” instituted a Synod on Synodality three years ago. Its conclusion in October, 2024, added another Church document to the many that the Catholic faithful know little about, yet they have a right to understand these and put them into practice. Therefore, the research problem is; **insufficient empowerment of the laity in the Catholic Church so they can participate in the ministry of Christ**. This study aims at unearthing the potential in SCCs to effectively participate as Church.

## 1.3 Significance of the study.

Today society is awakened, many laities are learned, and are capable of understanding all aspects of theology that ordained clergy are exposed to. The laity are also asking genuine questions regarding faith. Their desire to take up secondary training so as to acquire skills that add value to their professions, or else to acquire new skills so they can serve in the community, is an indicator that the laity are ready to work alongside ordained clergy in a spirit of synodality.

Findings of this study will inform Catholic faith leaders (Bishops and priests) in parishes, of the lived experiences of SCCs under them. Will help current Pastoral agents to appropriate their conceptualized idea of what Pastoral ministry really is- its joys and discomforts, and they will inform facilitators of LUMKO workshops, about aspects of the program that are well understood, that need improvement or change of approach.

## 1.4 Scope and delimitation of the study.

For the time and financial resources that were available, this study focused on Alumni of LUMKO Pastoral workshops, who were leaders of SCCs, and who belong to a SCCs. A Phenomenological study goes for small sample sizes 1-15 participants, because of the in-depth experiential data it fetches. This suited the researcher well as the interviews were carried out around in Lang’ata deanery. Participants who met these criteria were Three.

## 1.5 Theoretical<sup>7</sup> Framework.

Phenomenology is the study of phenomena, a phenomenon is anything that appears to someone in their conscious experience (Moran, 2000). It is rooted in the work of Edmund Husserl (Descriptive phenomenology), and further developed by his student Martin Heidegger (Interpretive phenomenology). Phenomenology is a Philosophy<sup>8</sup> and a methodology (the practical “how” of a research study). (Husserl, 1973, 2001, 2012:3). The researcher applied descriptive phenomenology (which allowed for a small sample size) and interpretive phenomenology (which allowed for thematic interpretation and discussion of analyzed data) approaches in this study.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction.

Literature reviewed was a close observation of other studies, related to this research. This helped to place the researchers work in the context of other scholars in pastoral ministries. One aspect about interpretive Phenomenology is that comprehensive literature review is not done before (when the researcher start exploring the phenomenon), but after data collection and analysis. When interpreting and discussing emerging insights from participants, the researcher connects these to literature, to theories, to a frame work, and to findings of previous studies etc. Relevant literature that supports the researcher’s findings is inserted in the discussion of findings.

<sup>5</sup> KCCB (Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.education.go.ke>.

<sup>7</sup> A theory is a set of ideas used by researchers to explain a research topic or phenomenon. They provide a framework for understanding, predicting, and controlling phenomena.

<sup>8</sup> A philosophy is a broader discipline encompassing questions about existence, knowledge, values, and reason. It provides the fundamental beliefs and assumptions that shape theories.

## 2.2 The importance of providing the laity with theological formation

Fr. Michael Sweeney OP, An international writer and public speaker with an extensive background in theology and formation for the laity<sup>9</sup> emphasizes the importance of providing the laity with a comprehensive theological formation to empower them in their roles within the church and society. He advocates for the laity to fully embrace their baptismal call, to be part of Christ’s royal priesthood. This research tries to bridge the gap between where the baptized laity are in the Catholic Church now (ignorant in knowledge, skills and methodology to minister), and where they should be (missionaries who exercise their royal priesthood and church hood).

Fr. Sweeney sees the empowerment of the laity as a move beyond clericalism. In an article entitled, “Beyond Personal Piety”, he argues rather strongly saying, “we need to move beyond our inherited clericalism. The idea that the laity have no agency in the church is not magisterial teaching; it is not, in fact true”<sup>10</sup> The researchers noticed that the issue of clericalism was among those discussed in the Synod on Synodality<sup>11</sup> Sweeney also promotes a collaborative relationship between the laity and the church hierarchy, suggesting the recognition of a lay office to facilitate this cooperation<sup>12</sup>. His passion has led him to establish formation programs, such as the Lay Mission Project which is designed to prepare lay Catholics for evangelizing families, secular institutions and culture<sup>13</sup>. His insights align with research questions of this study, an indicator that the concern of this study is shared by significant others at international level.

## 2.3 The Synod of Synodality

Cernuzio (2023), published an article in Vatican News entitled, “A Church that involves everyone and is close to world’s wounds”. The synthesis report emphasized the need for the Church to be more inclusive and responsive to the sufferings and needs of people around the world. Some of its highlights included; encouraging greater participation and recognition of lay people in the Catholic Church, addressing the needs of marginalized groups and advocating for their support, promoting unity among different Christian denominations, embracing digital tools for evangelization, encouraging the Church to listen more deeply to the voices of its members, and to explore even controversial issues<sup>14</sup>. Its final report calls for action; for a synodal Church that is more participatory, inclusive and mission oriented<sup>15</sup>.

The researcher sees this report as a dream coming true. In her essay published in<sup>14</sup> the researcher’s conclusion was, a hope that when the Church (as institution) prioritizes formation of the laity, Synodality would be experienced and hopefully remain the style of operation going forward. That would be a second Pentecost for the Church (as the People of God) and that the Church would surely become a better place because people would feel involved, heard, and healed.

According to Lumen Gentium (#10), all baptized Christians share in Christ’s priesthood and prophetic ministry. The ministerial priest, acting in Christ’s person, teaches, leads, and makes present the Eucharistic sacrifice on behalf of the faithful. The laity exercises their royal priesthood through sacraments, prayer, thanksgiving, holy living, self-denial, and charity. Despite this truth, how many Catholics truly understand and embrace this special privilege?<sup>16</sup>

## 2.4 Seminarians in AMECEA Region train in Safeguarding

Regionally, the researcher was enthused to read that in May, 2023, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, rectors from seminaries across the region, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Sudan, South Sudan, and Zambia gathered for training in Safe-guarding of children and vulnerable adults<sup>17</sup>. The training aimed at equipping the rectors with knowledge, and skills necessary for instilling a culture of safeguarding in their seminaries. They learnt that safeguarding is integral to priesthood formation from the onset. This initiative is part of a broader effort to address issues of abuse within the Church and to ensure that all children and vulnerable adults are protected, safe, and respected.

In the background of this study, the researcher noted that, after AMECEA bishops decided that SCCs were to become a way of being Church in the region, they entrusted the task to Parish Priests to SCCs, however initial formation on how these were to function was wanting. The researcher recalls that in mid 1980s, basic formation in the ‘Seven Steps Gospel sharing’ (*hatua Saba* in Kiswahili language) method in SCCs were given in Kakamega diocese by Bishop James Holme-Siedle and Fr. James (a Mill Hill Missionary). The researcher (a youth then) attended one. This is the only gospel sharing prayer method known to most SCCs in Kenya to date. Hence, this initiative of forming Seminarians’ in safeguarding is one way of creating awareness, increasing sensitivity of the clergy to needs of their faithful in future. More safeguarding is needed in institutions where priests take

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/users/Michael-sweeney>

<sup>11</sup> [www.synod.va](http://www.synod.va)

<sup>12</sup> <https://lumenchrist.org>

<sup>13</sup> <https://mxgrath.nd.edu/conferences/academic>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/assembly/synthesi/s/english/2023.10.28-ENG-Synthesis-Report.pdf>

<sup>15</sup> [https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26\\_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf](https://www.synod.va/content/dam/synod/news/2024-10-26_final-document/ENG---Documento-finale.pdf).

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[https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_const\\_19641121\\_lumen-gentium\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html)

<sup>17</sup> <https://jmt.scholasticahq.com/article/37349-pedagogical-reflections-by-east-african-women-religious-alumnae>

up administrative and management roles. Since priests stand in place of authority in the main stream church, their word is power, therefore their awareness, transformation and advocacy of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults will penetrate family life, consequent transforming them.

This aligns with the research question on empowerment. For historical and cultural reasons, majority of Church members in AMECEA region have a mentality that, “the ordained minister is the expert”<sup>18</sup>, hence they receive from him without question or critique. While this is true to a higher percentage, Walter Brueggemann in his e-book entitled, “The Prophetic Imagination”<sup>19</sup> says that, being agreed with may feel good for a moment, but does not offer the stuff for growth, instead, a good question, or a constructive disagreement from a friend is of great value. Cowan and Lee write that, “to give constructive positive and negative feedback to members of the community at appropriate moments, and to receive feedback from others require a measure of openness, disclosure, and empathy in mutual conversation”<sup>20</sup>. Cowan adds that, perhaps the best guide ever written on how to offer constructive feedback is found in Ephesians 4., and that this scripture is an essential principle for the life of SCCs.

The researcher also observed that, in some Sub-parishes (out-station), sometimes the priest will send the catechist on a Sunday to conduct a service and give Holy Communion to the faithful. The faithful will say, “Fr. did not come, we only had a catechist” meanwhile the catechist brought them Holy Communion, but value is placed on the priest instead of Christ in the Eucharist. Some faithful want Fr. to preside over the burial of their dead or else they get offended. It is as if the Parish Priest is a superman who does not tire, as if the diocese cannot lack priests to meet needs in all parishes, and as if, this catechist is not good enough. Attitude healing is needed here. The best members of the Church to spearhead this change of attitude, to retraining this mentality, are the ordained minister. The laity need to hear from the priests’ mouths that, the catechist is exercising his ministerial role, and that they too need to rediscover their unclaimed potential to serve humanity.

## 2.6 Reconciliation, Justice and Peace

Locally, Fr. Joseph Healey (Mary Knoll Missionary), a member of St. Kizito SCC, in Waruku out station of St. Austin’s parish, in Nairobi Archdiocese, has written a lot on SCCs and their impact on the Church and society in Kenya and beyond. In a document entitled, “The role of SCCs in the Implementation of Reconciliation, Justice, and Peace in Africa”, Fr. Healey addresses the historical shifts of SCCs, explores the involvement of SCCs in social and mission outreach, particularly in promoting justice, reconciliation, and peace in Kenya, through case studies like the Lenten Campaigns<sup>21</sup>.

Missionary outreach by SCCs in Kenya needs to pick up more, they need to be equipped with skills such as;

decision making, reconciling conflict, advocacy, negotiation and creating awareness about unjust practices. These skills are practically taught in LUMKO Pastoral workshops (awareness/Amos Program).

In Kenya, Sr. E. Gachiri has researched and published content on counterproductive Cultural practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). Her book entitled, “As beautiful as God Made me” is on unhealthy cultural practices; such are the issues that challenge faith-development at SCC level<sup>22</sup>. This research seeks to understand levels of mutuality in communications within SCCs, and most ideas by different writers on Pastoral ministries discussed herein, are subjects of conversation in SCCs.<sup>1</sup>

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

Methodology is an umbrella term encompassing many research designs with their specific methods. This chapter outlines the research design and methodology used in this study. It describes the sampling procedure, data collection instruments and process as well as thematic analysis techniques used to interpret data. Ethical considerations were adhered to.

### 3.2 Research design

A Phenomenological research design which is under qualitative research method was used in this study. was chosen due to its inductive, explorative and in-depth approach to obtaining data. Phenomenology had two main philosophical assumptions:

3.2.1 Edmund Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology is descriptive. He emphasized understanding the structures of consciousness and intentionality. By examining our conscious experiences, we can uncover the essential structures of phenomena, focusing on the experience itself, believed that reality (Ontological assumption) is internal to the knower, relationally (epistemological assumption), believed that the researcher must bracket (disengage) his/her feelings, experiences, and knowledge when interacting with participants. The researcher’s role is to capture the essence of the phenomenon under study and to describe it without interpretation or theorizing.

3.2.2 Martin Heidegger’s hermeneutic phenomenology is interpretive. He focuses on understanding the fundamental nature of existence and being. He believed in exploration of the deeper meanings behind experiences and how these meanings shape human understanding of the world. Heidegger believed that reality (Ontological assumption) is an interpretive process situated in an individual’s lived experience, relationally (epistemological

assumption), believed that the observer is part of world and not free from bias understanding of the phenomenon by interpretive means within historical and cultural contexts. The researcher role is to reflect on essential themes<sup>15</sup>.

### 3.2 Sampling procedure

Phenomenological studies utilize homogeneous and purposive samples. Sampling according to descriptive phenomenology (Giorgi, 2008:37), requires a small number of participants; at least three because “a sufficient number of variations are needed in order to come up with a typical essence”. Those Recruited were found capable of offering a meaningful perspective on the phenomenon; They shared a LUMKO Pastoral workshops lived experience, were currently or had been in leadership positions in the parish or in SCCs after the workshop, and were by then member of SCCs. A small sample size of three participants was found.

### 3.3 Research Instruments

An interview protocol was prepared according to phenomenological research design and observation. Every lived human experience has many dimensions; relationality, bodily experiences, space/places, objects and time/temporality. Its question items were framed to capture participants’ experiences in these dimensions. The researcher had question items such as: Can you please describe as detailed as possible a situation in which you experienced “LUMKO Workshops”. Follow up questions depended on the participant’s response, to probe further on the lived effect this memory had on the participants’ life<sup>16</sup>. Observation captured nuances in the narration and body language.

### 3.6 Data collecting procedures

The researcher got permission to carry out this study from the course instructor, at The Catholic University of Eastern Africa. The researcher contacted several leaders of SCCs within Lang’ata deanery by phone requesting them to participate in a research if they met a specified criterion. Those who accepted also gave their email address so the official request letter could be sent to them. Appointments for the interview were discussed and agreed upon via telephone. Between Saturday, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February and Thursday, the 7<sup>th</sup> of March 2024, three participants were interviewed using the traditional face-t-face style. On the actual interview day, the researcher arrived with Consent letters which were read and then signed by the participant before the interview began. The interview sessions lasted for One hour and a half to Two hours.

According to Sanders (1982), all forms of phenomenology emphasize rich qualitative accounts of data. Though the researcher had some interest in the phenomenon (LUMKO workshops), she suspend/bracketed her pre-

understandings in order to allow data to transcend what she knew about the phenomenon. Data was collected using a video tape recorder and was later transcribed using Otter.ai (a Speech to Text Software application). The researcher edited the transcribed data and saved it accordingly.

### 3.7 Data analysis Procedures

The researcher had to make sense of this massive data by segmenting it (identifying significant codes, categories and patterns). It was later reconstructed into meaningful and comprehensible themes. These themes communicate the essence of what data revealed (Boeije, 2010: 76). The themes that emerged were: The Identity and Character of SCCs; leadership and membership in SCCs; objectives and the essence of SCCs; ccommunication skills in SCCs; skill based LUMKO workshops and emerging/pertinent issues (Power dynamic/Competition).

### 3.8 Validity and Truthfulness

Schurink and Poggenpoel (1998), emphasize the truth-value of qualitative research. In this study, the researcher consciously bracketed her feelings, knowledge and perceptions, in order to understand the phenomenon from the participants’ experience of it. More bracketing was done during the transcription of collected data which further contributed to the truth. The participants received a copy of the text to validate that it reflected their perspectives regarding the phenomenon (SCCs) that was studied. A synopsis of the findings of the completed study is presented next.

## CHAPTER FOUR: INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter looks into the richness of lived experiences shared by the participants. It uncovers the essence of their narratives. Drawing from interpretive phenomenology, the interpretation and discussion of findings were anchored in themes that emerged. Each theme captured the participant’s experience, as well as opened a window to see the inside of the phenomenon of study (experiences in SCCs). The researcher discussed each theme in detail, capturing experiences of each participant on the same. The researcher aligned the themes with relevant insights from post-data literature review, so as to capture the nuanced meanings that participants attached to their experiences, offering a fairly comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

### 4.2 The Identity and Character of SCCs

The SCCs to which interviewees’ belonged had a saint’s name (St. Jude Thaddeus, Holy Trinity, and St. Catherine of Siena SCCs). These names meant a lot to members. Members read life histories of their patron saints,

<sup>15</sup> [The Giants and Forerunners of Phenomenology: Husserl, Heidegger, and their Predecessors](#)

<sup>16</sup> [\(66\) Dr Rakesh Maurya - YouTube.](#)

and celebrated their feast days. Documents analyzed gave the Jewish/Christian tradition of acquiring new names. For example, Abram’s name changed to Abraham (Genesis 17:5), Jacob became Israel (Genesis 32:28), Sarai became Sarah (Gen. 17: 15), and Simon son of John became Peter the Rock (John 1:42).<sup>17</sup> Saints are known for the piety, and the wisdom they have contributed to the Church. Saints are believed to intercede with God on behalf of those in need. Parents choose saints names for their children during baptism and confirmation. These names are believed to connect the individual to the saint’s legacy and serve as a reminder of Christian values. The faithful want to instill virtues associated with a particular saint in their own lives. St. Thomas Aquinas Major Seminary in Nairobi for example, might emphasize seminarians’ intellectual pursuit, critical thinking and love for learning.<sup>18</sup> John S. Mbiti, A Kenyan-born Christian philosopher and Anglican Canon writes that in African Tradition, only the virtuous were named after.<sup>19</sup>

The interviewed leaders knew how long their individual membership in their SCC was but were vague on the inception of their particular SCCs. In words of respondent Two,

I might not really know the exact date, because small Christian communities change with time. When I was young, I did not really know much about Small Christian Communities. I just followed my mother after Mass, but with time I came to know the formula being applied is that 10 households can make a Small Christian Community. So after my education, when I came back home, I started moving on with what I found, which is now St. Catherine of Siena.<sup>20</sup>

The size of a SCC varies from place to place for various reasons, but the normal is 10-20 people at a prayer session. According to respondent One, “If a SCC is big, or if two big SCCs are near each other, a third one is created from them”<sup>21</sup>. The researcher suggests that SCCs may start keeping proper records of who they are and do, because in future histories of SCCs may be invaluable treasures.

With regard to demographic attendance in SCC meetings (men, women, youth, children), women were said to be the majority, men were fewer, youth were few but some responded well when invited, when there was an interesting activity in Church and when they were required to participate. Children followed parents to SCCs, and when they grew a bit (12-14), they joined PMC.<sup>22</sup> Respondent One opines,

The composition of our SCC is quite challenging. We have very few men, majority are women. Some women come with children. We also have a few youth who come to pray with us, but the men, in terms of percentage, maybe 5%.<sup>23</sup>

Yet respondent Two shared a positive reality about the men participating actively in Church thus,

Our attendance is something you can be proud of, out of the Catholic men that I know who are members of my church, and also members of my SCC, to the men I can give 70% attendance. Yes. In fact, it’s a known fact within the Church that, this is the SCC that is led by men and they are quite active. Of course, starting with us leaders, and we thank God for that grace. Women, give them 90%.<sup>24</sup>

The researcher is enthused by the very commendable and encouraging feedback. This respondent looked at the male gender participation at both parish and SCC level, and in both, men are quite active, even with women still being more. The researcher exhorts the male gender to claim their presence in SCCs. If men in St. Catherine of Siena SCC are active participants at Parish level as well, it is possible for other men too. Belonging to a SCC is a wise choice; your presence will bring gender balance, and your participation will strengthen you spiritually. Besides, your slow action is denying the church the use of your God given talents for which you will be accountable.

Documents analyzed in respect to this phenomenon of women participating more frequently in various groups reveals that, “females find same-sex social interactions more rewarding than males do; the brain mechanisms related to oxytocin, a hormone associated with bonding and social connection, play a role in this difference. As a result, women prioritize social interactions and relationship building; they actively engage in activities that foster connections and friendships”.<sup>25</sup>

### 4.3 Leadership and membership in SCCs

The process of examining leadership and membership in SCCs resulted in the recognition of the role played by the Parish priest, qualities of those eligible for election to leadership in SCCs, and new members in SCCs. All respondents said that, the parish priest was in charge of all SCCs under the parish and that the latter presided over the election of SCC leaders. Respondent One observes, “The Parish Priest organizes with his Parish Council, then they call members of all SCCs to come to the parish, and we choose

<sup>17</sup> *The Holy Bible: Revised Standard Version*. Bible Societies of Kenya, 2016.

<sup>18</sup> [Stlouisparish.org](http://Stlouisparish.org)

<sup>19</sup> Review: [Untitled] on JSTOR

<sup>20</sup> Respondent Two. Interviewed on Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 2024.

<sup>21</sup> Respondent One, Interviewed on Sunday, 4<sup>th</sup> February, 2024

<sup>22</sup> PMC (Pontifical Missionary Childhood).

<sup>23</sup> One Feb.2024

<sup>24</sup> Two, March 2024

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.aei.org/op-eds/perspective-women-are-more-likely-to-make-friends-at-work-than-men-herers-why-that-matters>.

<https://news.gsu.edu/2019/01/30/females-find-social-interactions-to-be-more-rewarding-than-males-study-reveals>

our incoming leaders”.<sup>26</sup> This agrees with respondent Two who narrates ...in my parish, members of SCCs are normally given a particular Sunday to elect their leaders, which normally happen within the church vicinity. The priest is the overall overseer of that day. In fact, he claims on that particular day, he is the returning officer. He makes sure that every SCC has turned up, and they have elected their leaders. It is done in an open and democratic way.<sup>27</sup>

Respondent Three shade light on who qualifies to be elected as a leader of a SCC thus,

The principle is that; leaders have to be baptized Christians. We find the enlightened in the group, the best to lead the others. Nobody gives what s/he does not have and nobody has everything, we are human beings not angels, but let leaders be practicing Christians, have good morals, and be ready to learn as they lead.<sup>28</sup>

“The best to lead the rest” statement implies the expected role modelling from leaders of SCCs. From classical writings of Greek philosophers (Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Isocrates), “Quality Education through Quality Teachers (QEQT) was important. Teachers had to be morally upright; they internalized their knowledge and practiced it.<sup>29</sup> This is relevant to life in SCCs, ministering through lived example demonstrates the “how” of the message. Members will see their leaders walking the talk and will imitate them.

Once the election exercise is completed, the new leaders are introduced in their Sub-parishes. Respondent One underscores,

Our Parish Priest always inducts new leaders with a homily on leadership, and/or tells them what their duties and responsibilities are. When new members join us (those who relocate into our neighborhood), we invite them for a session of prayer, during which they are inducted into the system. We introduce ourselves to them, they also introduce themselves to us, we tell them what we always do and what will be required of them as members. Their names are put in our register, also taken to the parish, and then the parish priest also organizes an induction of all new ones in all SCCs every year, once a year. It is always a great feast.<sup>30</sup>

Andrea Amorosi of memberclicks.com endorses that welcoming, inducting and celebrating new members in an organization are significant steps. A good orientation creates a positive initial experience for new members. This positive impression influences the new members overall perception, commitment and level of involvement in the group.<sup>31</sup>

Outgoing leaders of SCCs hand over leadership at SCC level, while outgoing Parish Council leaders hand over

leadership at the Parish. This is ritually done. The researcher encourages that putting closure to leadership by handing over and thanking the outgoing leaders is psychologically and spiritually settling, so it should never be overlooked.

#### 4.4 Objectives and the essence of SCCs

Interviewees were very clear about specific objectives of SCCs. They were informed about the biblical origin of SCCs (Acts: 42-47). Paraphrased, the scripture says that, those baptized devoted themselves to the apostolic teachings and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to the prayers. According to respondent Two, the main objective of SCCs is to grow together in faith. He underscores,

First, we are a community of prayer. Praying people led by faith in God through Jesus Christ. What brings us together is to grow in faith by reflecting on the word of God, not to be Sunday Christians only. Rather, every day so that the way we relate in our neighborhood is guided by the fact that we are believers.<sup>32</sup>

Another respondent says, “Ours is to know God and love Him, then to serve others as an expression of our love for God”. Emphasizing the value of her SCC, respondent One added,

The core of our togetherness is to help one another. We first help the person as a SCC, and only call on the parish for help when the problem is too big for us. Our members are committed to this SCC because it is sustained by prayer. In a week we pray together twice, yeah! Our meeting time is purposely fixed a bit late, so those employed can come and then we pray together. In this prayer there is space for people to share their problems/challenges, we listen then we put it into prayer, this prayer has helped member to overcome problems. So people treasure it.<sup>33</sup>

In these excerpts, informants give a picture of what a SCC is. It is a place where people who share the same faith gather to pray, to study scripture together, and support each other’s growth in faith. It is a sacred space where care, being listened to, consideration and support are availed. A family where one shares gifts and challenges, where the burdened find relief, and where daily witness of Christian living is encouraged.

Pope John Paul II, in a Post-Synodal exhortation entitled, “*Ecclesia in Africa*”, specifies characteristics of SCCs thus,

To be small enough to foster close human relationships, to evangelize themselves so they can bring good news to others, to pray and to listen to God’s word, to encourage members to take responsibility in living an ecclesial life, to reflect on different human problems in the light of the Gospel, to live

<sup>26</sup> One, Feb. 2024

<sup>27</sup> Two, March 2024

<sup>28</sup> Respondent Three, Interviewed on Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> March, 2024

<sup>29</sup> Majawa, C., (2021), *Patristic Education*. Nairobi, Published by Scroll Technologies, p.63-73.

<sup>30</sup> One, Feb.2024

<sup>31</sup> <https://memberclicks.com/blog/new-member-orientation>

<sup>32</sup> Two, March 2024

<sup>33</sup> One, Feb.2024

Christ’s love for every body and to transcend limits of natural solidarities of tribe and race.<sup>34</sup>

In the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*,<sup>35</sup> Pope John Paul II further emphasizes that SCCs should draw nourishment from the word of God, avoid polarization and hypercritical attitudes, remain connected to the local and universal Church and maintain communion with pastors and the magisterium. The Pope also acknowledges challenges in maintaining a strong missionary focus and calls for on-going evangelization. Hence all Christians (SCCs included) have the responsibility to be missionary; to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ with the world.

Yet another respondent said, that theologically, “SCCs are there for the salvation of souls; for the good of individuals and of the church, to help the members see God face to face at the end of our journey here on Earth”.<sup>36</sup>

Informants One and Two confirmed that their SCCs create time to go out for prayer and recollection. Some of the places they have gone to include: Resurrection garden, Vincentian prayer house in Nairobi, and Bible on the ground in Nanyuki. However, respondent Three acknowledged saying, “Ideally we should, but we are not there yet. However, we enjoy good conversations; have trusted companions in our companionship and share meals especially when we have SCC Mass”.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4.5 Communication skills in SCCs

Communication skills cut across all disciplines. Instructional communication skills employed by leaders of SCCs were looked at in terms of; how they ensured that members understood, and how they handled barriers to communication such as; lack of interest, distraction, misinterpretation, and negative attitudes. To ensure that understanding happens when facilitating a SCC meeting, respondent One notes, “I use a language that is understood by all, very simple English or/and Kiswahili”.<sup>38</sup> Respondent Two endorses, “You don’t become the only speaker when teaching; give the point and let members interact”.<sup>39</sup> Respondents Two and Three value direct instructions with regard to, “have ground rules, exercising civility, being orderly, respecting self and others, and switching off mobile phones”.<sup>40</sup>

All respondents acknowledged that being distracted is a common phenomenon, and that people come to meetings in varied states of mind. Informant One observes that, Some members come with unresolved issues, disturbed about a fight in the family perhaps, and they want to share with a friend, so conversation is going on parallel to a prayer

session. I handle this, by separating them, and/or asking one of them to start a song”.<sup>41</sup>

For respondent Two, “if it is a gospel sharing session, I ask that distracted one to read or interpret, or to start a song as a change of activity, hopefully after singing a bit, their attentiveness and focus will be back”.<sup>42</sup> According to the third informant, “Some apostles of Jesus were fisher men with limited education, others were scholars like Luke. We have to work together because each has a soul”.<sup>43</sup>

Respondent Two shared how he handles absent mindedness that will have diminished understanding thus, “I find out those who have understood, I make them explain what they have understood to ascertain correctness, I then pair these with those who have not understood”.<sup>44</sup> The pairing works magic, especially if the paired are friends, he adds. For those who show some attitude and lack of interest during SCC sessions, Informant Three encourages patience saying, Christ who is our role model was misunderstood, at the same time; he came, not for the righteous but the weak, so we do not tire. It is not easy to deal with the educated, they will only criticize, because they believe they know everything, I prefer to deal with those willing to learn.<sup>45</sup>

The researcher commends the efforts made by leaders of SCCs in this regard; using simple language to make understanding easy is a sign of respect, love and care of recipients. Introducing the subject then allowing members to engage each other rather than lecturing is healthy for SCCs; it not allows learning to learn for the facilitator, it increases members’ capacity to critically think, use their imagination as well as develop their team spirit, cooperation, and collaboration. This is encouraging.

Documents related to adult learning revealed beneficial facts that can help future leaders of SCCs. First of all, teachers of adults and youth are called facilitators, instructors or trainers. Their skill of teaching is different from that of a teacher in a formal school setting. When facilitating adult learning, list the direct benefits and uses of the information you’re going to share, allow adults to choose whether or not to participate, and make decisions about their pace, place, or mode of learning. This way, you provide a sense of ownership and control for adult learners. Adults are motivated by their goals. They want to know before hand, how the content they are getting is going to help them achieve their personal/professional goals. If the content is not immediately useful, adults will dismiss it as unnecessary, and may show boredom or resent the facilitator for wasting their valuable time.

<sup>34</sup>Pope John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa* (89).

<sup>35</sup> Pope John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990)

<sup>36</sup> Three, March 2024

<sup>37</sup> Three, March 2024

<sup>38</sup> One, Feb.2024

<sup>39</sup> Two, March 2024

<sup>40</sup> Two and Three, March 2024

<sup>41</sup> One, Feb.2024

<sup>42</sup> Two, March 2024

<sup>43</sup> Three, March 2024

<sup>44</sup> Two, March 2024

<sup>45</sup> Three, March 2024



## “The Lived Experience of Members and Leaders of Small Christian Communities; Trained Under LUMKO East Africa in Nairobi.”

Adult learners take up secondary training purposely to acquire skills that add value to the professions they already practice. They also acquire new skills so they can serve in the community. When preparing to instruct adults, it helps to do a skills assessment prior to the program, so as to strategically factor in the course, needed skills, rather than teach what some already know. That is how the boredom if the informed may interfere with the internalizing of those learning the skills for the first time. The alternative is to engage those informed in peer teaching and be ready to fill in gaps. Adult learners find pleasure in solving problems, so, the facilitator should present his/her information in a way that allows critical thinking and problem solving skills.<sup>46</sup> Adults have long lived experiences; they know what works and what does not. So when teaching them, go direct to the point or else they may confront you with judgments like, “that won’t work” or “that is not true, in my experience”. When facilitating a learning session with adults, include real-life examples and realistic scenarios in your training to enable them connect with their past experiences.<sup>47</sup>

With regard to culture and being sensitive to ethnic languages, traditions and values, all respondents acknowledged the universality of God. Respondent Three says that, “good culture attracts, e.g. the culture that Jesus Christ created which began with a few Jews who were later joined by Greeks and Roman and today all Christians”.<sup>48</sup> Respondent One observes that, “The church encourages enculturation. We emphasize a Christian culture that borrows from the wealth found in diverse cultures, we single out charitable practices and condemning harmful one e.g. killing/destroying life”.<sup>49</sup>

Respondent Two brought it the Universality of God saying, God is for all of us regardless of one’s belief or cultural background. God sees and treats us equally. With that in mind, we don’t say things going through our tribes, what we call stereotypes. We try to avoid that as much as possible. For example, there is this notion that, “Kikuyu people can steal”. So when you hear something like that coming up, you suppress it because it can hurt and damage relationships. Again, we try to appreciate and support each other. If one of the members loses a loved one, s/he expects us to be on the front line to assist, here we embrace a spirit of unity and set aside/collapse all our tribal thinking.<sup>50</sup>

Respondents One and Two appreciated the ethnic mix in their SCCs saying, “Ours is cosmopolitan” and “We live in a Metropolitan city” respectively. Respondent Three endorsed that, “It is easy to work with a mixed group

sometimes, because in some same ethnic groups, when you wrong one member, you become an enemy of all”.<sup>51</sup>

The researcher recognizes the valuable highlights on culture made by respondents. Going forward, it will be important that SCCs insist on cultivating the Christian culture by allowing the good in all cultures to unite them, and purposely choosing to shun cultural practices that divide humanity.

### 4.6 Skill-based LUMKO Workshops for SCCs

The skills trained in LUMKO workshops include; giving feedback, peer learning, decision making, empowering members and resolving conflict.

Respondent One affirms, “LUMKO is helpful, it inducts us into what we are supposed to do. In the parish, after every two years they (parish council) bring people of LUMKO to talk to us”.<sup>52</sup> Respondent Three said,

I am an *alumnus* of Gaba in Eldoret, and we followed the LUMKO program as priest, sisters, and catechists. As soon as we entered, we were taught the LUMKO way of being Church and we practiced that until we left. The purpose was to internalize it, so that one brings its practices to his/her ministries.<sup>53</sup>

#### 4.6.1 Giving Feedback as a Skill

Feedback was acknowledged as an important practice in SCCs. Respondent One witnesses, “We have grown a lot because we tell each other how good they are or what they have done and we get encouragement to improve”.<sup>54</sup> Respondent Two adds that Feedback makes us see our actions from another person’s point of view, and it is so spontaneous. He continues,

Feedback is spontaneous; it comes naturally because of the love; of the bond we share. For example, on the day we are animating Mass, members play different roles, each giving their best, at the end, we evaluate how we performed. Members congratulate each other, “yes, the way you represented us there was good, continue in that way” Other members yearn to play a role the next time.<sup>55</sup>

The researcher remarks that often people think feedback is criticism especially if it’s about something that is not well done. One is not able to separate self from the wrong they have done/mistake. When giving feedback in such a case, a disclaimer is necessary, e.g. “What I am about to tell you is for your good, and I am telling you out of love and care”. Then you give the feedback by saying what was good first and finishing with what needs improvement. Giving feedback shortly after the incident is better because the person can connect quickly using the short term memory rather than delaying it.

<sup>46</sup> Myers, et al., 2016)

<sup>47</sup> [Evidence-Based Instructional Strategies for Adult Learners: A Review of the Literature \(cuny.edu\)](https://www.cuny.edu/learning-innovation/evidence-based-instructional-strategies-for-adult-learners/)

<sup>48</sup> Three, March 2024

<sup>49</sup> One, Feb.2024

<sup>50</sup> Two, March 2024

<sup>51</sup> Three, March 2024

<sup>52</sup> One, Feb.2024

<sup>53</sup> Three, March 2024

<sup>54</sup> One, Feb.2024

<sup>55</sup> Two, March 2024

#### 4.6.2 Peer Learning in SCCs

Respondents concurred in seeing Peer learning as part of their daily experience in interactions meetings, and conversations. Respondent One quipped, “In meetings we give time for sharing and members give very good input, very good encouragement out of lived experiences to others. Those with questions ask and they get answers”.<sup>56</sup> Respondent Three argues that Peer learning can be positive and/or negative. Sharing a Kinyarwanda proverb from his culture, *Ihene mbi ntawe uyizirikaho iye* meaning, do not tie your good goat near a bad one. For example, those who do not wed in church because they do not understand that sacrament, when they get a good pastor to educate them and link them to couples for Christ, they get encouraged by seeing happy couples who are committed to each other. On the other hand if a rightly married couple lives among care free couples, they will begin to see their own as a burden, then get discouraged.<sup>57</sup>

#### 4.6.3 Decision Making in SCCs

Decision making was seen as a communal process. According to respondent One, Decision is not a one person making in a Christian community. We share a lot when there is something that needs our discussion. We call the executives, we share with them, and they come up with views. These views are presented to the whole SCC, when they look at it, they say, “Oh, that's a good idea! We can do this; we can do the other! It is then, that we come up strong and make a decision. And tell the parish, “We have decided, we are going to do this”.<sup>58</sup>

Respondent Two had this to say about decision making, Before we decide on anything, we invite as many suggestions/opinions as possible, we look at them all, we ask members, if we do this, or if we follow this route, and get to this, is that okay? At the end, we get two or three points processed by members to guide our decision making. So we will do it in a very inclusive way.<sup>59</sup>

Respondent Three quoted scripture<sup>60</sup>, about giving milk to infants and hard food to adult. It metaphorically refers to spiritual maturity. He compared traditional courtships that took long and involved many significant decision makers to modern day ones that are abrupt and short lived. The respondent acknowledged in following terms, As leaders, we are often tempted to impose our own ideas. The best way is to let people participate in the process, to come up with initiatives then as leaders, you look at them, if good, approve them. Unfortunately, this has not entered our blood veins well yet. The African tendency to let the leader

decide for us is still there. However, there are times when imposing a decision is necessary. If you allow everybody to decide they may say we do not want this project to go on, yet it is needed. Take Kenya for example, we are now complaining about taxes. If it is left to go on as a debate, no action will take place. So in anger, the leader is abused but he has to, it is a necessary sacrifice to make.<sup>61</sup>

#### 4.6.4 Empowering SCC Members.

Empowerment of members in SCCs was described as natural as well as learnt. Respondent Three was intrigued by charismatic gifts in the church thus, In a SCC you find different gifts. Some conduct choir without learning it anywhere. It surprises me; I have not understood that. Women are extremely good in organizing, especially on Sundays when they are the ones leading. Unfortunately, they have been under looked for many years. Today, our Church cannot do much without the contribution of women. But not every woman is the same. They are exceptional because they have that gift of learning from one another. In fact, men are just watching.<sup>62</sup>

The researcher recognizes this as good feedback for the female gender. It is good for them to know that their good works in church are noticed and appreciated. However, the respondent also says, ‘but not every woman is the same’. What does that mean? Could it be an invitation for women to do more, especially to fellow women who are not yet ‘there’? A document analyzed in this regard affirms that, when women assume leadership positions, they tend to exhibit transformational leadership styles. They inspire organizational dedication, epitomize the organization’s mission and encourage collaboration more effectively.<sup>63</sup>

Respondent Two adds, “Everybody is given an equal chance to handle any task. Even me as a leader, if I go late, someone else with just take the mantle of leadership, and lead others in our usual prayers”.<sup>64</sup> Respondent One asserts, We share responsibilities. We always have parish induction at the beginning of the year. Most members are inducted into how to lead prayers. So you as a leader now have to guide, to remind some people who may forget the pattern, the order of prayer, you’re there to assist but all of us are given the induction and chance to facilitate prayer meetings.<sup>65</sup>

Another form of empowering was reflected in the cooperation SCC members give each other in difficult times. Respondent Two asserts, Take this scenario. We have lost a member of our SCC. The SCC automatically takes charge. We are going to mourn for days. So we ensure that some of us are present in the evening hours to welcome mourners. To organize the singing,

<sup>56</sup> One, Feb.2024

<sup>57</sup> Three, March 2024

<sup>58</sup> One, Feb.2024

<sup>59</sup> Two, March 2024

<sup>60</sup> 1 Cor3:2 or Hebrews 5: 13-14

<sup>61</sup> Three, March 2024

<sup>62</sup> Three, March 2024

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.apa.org/topics/women-girls/female-leaders-make-work-better>

<sup>64</sup> Two, March 2024

<sup>65</sup> One, Feb.2024

scripture readings, and the person to interpret them. To cook and serve food. To fund raise and to participate in the funeral committee. Sometimes members of other denominations request for a day to offer prayers. We allow them but we remain in charge.<sup>66</sup>

Responding to whether their SCC had an influence on the neighborhood, informant two testified that neighbor in a different church asked him for a copy of a song sung in our church”. He further endorsed that as a SCC, they reach out to youth in the neighborhood saying, “Youth are not attending church, sometimes we invite ourselves to their homes and say, “today we would like you to pray with us”, they join and as you leave you hear them say, “I will come to church next time”.<sup>67</sup>

Unity in diversity is echoed here three times; in grief, sharing spiritual resources and reaching out to youth. Indeed, commendable. It is good feedback to Parish Priests. Christian Unity is celebrated yearly (January 18<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup>). Here is a SCC that observes it whenever possible. Enhancing unity in diversity by participating together and share the wealth of their churches for the good of their human community. Other SCCs can borrow a leaf. Another positive move is, adults of a SCC (aware of the challenges their sons and daughters are going through) choosing to reach out to them. This is a strategy worth reflecting about. What if we changed our dysfunctional strategies of judging, blaming, and condemning youth? What if we befriended them instead?

The Vatican document, *Unitatis Redintegratio* (Decree on Ecumenism) promulgated during Vatican II Council specifically addresses ecumenism. While Christ founded one Church, many Christian communions exist today. Their division contradicts Christ’s will and hinders the preaching of the Gospel. The movement towards unity is what Ecumenism is all about.<sup>68</sup>

Catholic Principles on Ecumenism emphasize that Christ’s love reveals itself through unity. Christ prayed for unity of believers, and He instituted the Eucharist as a sign and reality of the Church’s unity. The Holy Spirit gathers the people of the New Covenant into a unity of faith, hope and charity.<sup>69</sup>

William Russell (2011), gives Eighty Principles of Ecumenism. He aims at a Catholic audience; to help Catholics understand better the commitment of their own church to ecumenism. Never the less, the content is also useful to members of other churches. It will help them understand the Catholic position on these matters.<sup>70</sup>

The researcher would like to highlight this aspect from history and from experience, so that going forward, appropriate care may be taken for the good of evangelization at SCC level. Decision taken during funerals may be influenced by emotions and may be rushed. It is at such times that briefed families most need preferential care and understanding from their spiritual leaders. In the Education history of Kenya, names of schools ended with initials of the religious affiliation of the area. E.g. Mayanja R.C. School or Bwayi P.A.G. School. The rivalry of Christian denominations has been taking advantage of funerals. Today you find an R.C. school with a minimal enrolment of Catholic students and with a neighborhood of non- Catholics. One of the reasons for such a scenario is, when a Catholic family (perhaps not so active in church) suffered loss, the religious group that quickly responds to their need is...So, when the storm is over, the religious affiliation is also likely changes. The new pastor will continue to visit and console, the faithful’s heart will grow fonder.

A recent true story in one of the SCCs was again death of a son in a Catholic home. For funeral Mass, the family/the SCC were to raise K.sh... for Fr.’s fuel so he can come to preside over the funeral Mass. It was hunger time so both the SCC/the family had financial challenges. News about fuel money irritated the briefed parent (father) who quickly announced, “This other group has been coming here to sing/preach, let them burry my son”. And so it happened. Is it a case of plentiful harvest with few laborers? What is it? Food for thought.

#### 4.6.5 Conflict in SCCs

Addressing conflict in SCCs was not exhaustively responded to. Respondents acknowledged that SCCs have their own challenges so they talked about how they get to know that there is conflict. Respondent One said, “There are some members who are whistle-blowers’. They come to inform us”.<sup>71</sup> Non-verbal communications by victims (like moods changing and sadness). Informants also talked about reconciliation strategies but had a challenge about getting to root causes of conflicts. Respondent Two affirms, “We insist on the 2<sup>nd</sup> most universal commandment of loving your neighbor as you love yourself, but we know social problems can never be finished, so even that immediate relief that we are able for is better than nothing”<sup>72</sup>. Respondent One gave a response that is rooted in Catholic Social Teaching; the principle of subsidiarity. She said,

<sup>66</sup> Two, March 2024

<sup>67</sup> Two, March 2024

<sup>68</sup> [https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_decree\\_1964112](https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_1964112)

<sup>69</sup> <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/45497/chapter392449250>

<sup>70</sup> William R., M. Afr. (2021), *Eighty Principles of Ecumenism; How to Put Ecumenism into Practice*. Series No.2. Makuyu-Kenya. Paulines Publications Africa.

<sup>71</sup> One, Fe.2024

<sup>72</sup> Two, March 2024

When we hear that some are in conflict, we take time to consult those from the area where those in conflict come from. What they can sort out by themselves, we let them do it. When we see it increasing that is when we come in, we call the people concerned, talk to them hearing both sides. We take more time to reflect on their shared stories in prayer before we give them feedback.<sup>73</sup>

The wisdom here is resisting those in conflict to make leaders judge over them. The leaders' role is to shade light; create awareness through feedback, and counsel if necessary. Adults must choose freely their next action after they have received these interventions. Respondent Two alerts, “When I realize there is a problem, I approach those in conflict separately, prompt them to speak out as I listen. I ponder it, after which I find a good way of talking them into peace”<sup>74</sup>. Respondent Three adds, In a certain parish, collections, for fuel and food for the parish priests brought conflict. The community expects everybody to give equally; it is not possible because people's income is different. The one who has not given is seen as a very bad person. That person will differ with the SCC leader(s). The report is taken to the parish, and some precautions may be taken against him/her. Other options of solving such problems can be explored (Acts 4:32-35).<sup>75</sup>

#### 4.7 Emerging/Pertinent Issues

##### 4.7.1 Power Dynamics in SCCs.

The question of power dynamics (positive and negative) in SCCs was affirmatively responded to by all. Positive power was exercised in SCCs by appointed and by emergent leaders who mean well. However, respondents were aware of members who begin to regularly attend the SCC meetings especially when election time is nearing or exercise power to outshine the official (seating) leaders. Respondent One observes, These things are there in society. Some of us who have been appointed at the parish level, when we see such people come up in our SCC, we give them responsibility so they also participate, that is how we manage them.<sup>76</sup>

Another response was in agreement that desire for power exists and added that some even bribe so they can become ..... This respondent explained how change of values and desire for titles is replacing the Christian value system. Just listen to salutations in Church and or any public gathering. The one addressing people in Church will start by saying, Rev. Fr..., honorable MCA of the area..., chief Principal..., will mention all association groups in the Church (CWA, CMA, Altar servers, Choir, PMC,...), and as they are mentioned, so they stand, the speaker will finish by saying,

‘and all other Christians’ meaning those without positions in church and society<sup>77</sup>.

Honestly!!! Which branch of Theology deals with good manners/proper language in church? Are not the mentioned and the unmentioned Christian if they are baptized? Are not the baptized and the unbaptized people of God? Why are turning the church into a platform of recognition? What presidency are we setting? Are our consciences white washed by trends of modern society? No wonder some may bribe or join Church groups for wrong reasons, perhaps just for a title, just for a public mention. Please note that the researcher is not at all against pursuing higher goals. On the contrary. The issue here is compromising gospel values; let our advancement humble us aware that all is grace from God, and is for the good of humanity. The Declaration “*Dignitas Infinita*”<sup>78</sup> highlights the indispensable nature of human dignity; it invites us to live out our faith in the specific contexts where God has placed us. This ministerial call should be enough, but how often we forget.

##### 4.7.2 Competition in SCCs

Informant Two gave a response to a question that revealed competition. He utters, “You will find that the SCCs are trying to outshine each other on which one is more religious, which is a good thing, because at the end of the day, that spiritual growth is what we are looking for”.<sup>79</sup>

Although the respondent meant well, this means to an end requires catechizing. The aspect of SCCs outshining one another on which one is more religious implies competition. Besides, how is “being more religious” measured? Competition can be healthy and/or unhealthy. If SCCs must compete, let us help them understand competition from a Christian perspective and provide a psychological buffer for losers in these competitions. Help them to internalize that popularity, success, titles, loses etc. are temporary and they should not define them. Human beings are intrinsically good and each one is uniquely gifted. We all know how exam oriented assessment systems have psychologically damaged some people in society. Our aim should be to heal.

##### 4.7.3 Pertinent Issues in SCCs

Current Globalization is of a different order to what has gone before. Multinational organizations constantly seek under-exploited markets. They target youth and children by creating new needs. The children and youth are prized for the influence they have over adult spending, and for their own rapid growing power. The ‘consumer-media’ culture has product ‘brand builders’. These establish particular brands as an integral part of the way people would like to see themselves. There is an attempt ‘to get people young’ so they can focus on brand rather than the inherent qualities of the product (playing with human psychology). When responding

<sup>73</sup> One, Feb.2024

<sup>74</sup> Two, March 2024

<sup>75</sup> Three, March 2024

<sup>76</sup> One, Feb.2024

<sup>77</sup> Three, March 2024

<sup>78</sup> [Declaration “Dignitas Infinita” on Human Dignity \(2 April 2024\) \(vatican.va\)](https://www.vatican.va/press-releases/2024/04/20240402-declaration-dignitas-infinita-on-human-dignity-2-april-2024-vatican.va)

<sup>79</sup> Two, March 2024

to the question on demography's in SCCs (membership attendance in terms of men, women, youth, and the children). Respondent Two said, “Now, the youth, I don't really want to say we have a problem. No, because,....”<sup>80</sup> Could this statement be denial? It certainly indicates a discomfort about the level of participation by youth in SCCs.

The traditional linear style of administration is challenged today; there is demand to shift from hierarchical structures to, decentralized decision-making. Administrators (Church leaders inclusive) are encouraged to create inclusive environments where different voices are heard, to think critically, be reflexive, transparent and open to alternative paradigms. They are challenged to question taken-for-granted assumptions address power imbalances and promote social justice within organizations<sup>81</sup>. The knowledge economy and complex technology must also be learnt by Church leaders and members to avoid falling victims of ill motivated people who rob uninformed customers especially in international money transfers/ cyber-crimes.

Health issues, particularly mental health due to pressures of life. Money being the root of all evil must be confronted by intensified teaching of morals. Many rural SCCs already live simply; they may not appreciate it because society trends tell them otherwise. Let the good in their life styles be highlighted (based on scripture) so they can appreciate self and others can learn from them. Let also the vanity in all we chase be highlighted so people can make informed choices.

## CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Summary

This study explored lived experiences of leaders and members of/in SCCs who have been trained under LUMKO Pastoral workshops. The purpose was to understand the experience of trained pastoral agents ministering to/in their SCCs which has laid open successes and gaps especially with regard to empowerment. A phenomenological approach was used to capture the essence of participants experiences. Three members/leaders in/of SCCs trained under LUMKO Pastoral Program were selected through purposive sampling, data was collected via an interview guide and observation and thematic analysis was done. Findings revealed satisfying experiences as well as the need for empowerment of SCCs in knowledge, skills and methodology for ministry.

### 5.2 Conclusion

Though respondents were few, they met the requirements of a Phenomenological inquiry. Data collected from them was rich and from lived experiences of/in their SCCs. The discussion of themes that emerged after data analysis, gave a clear picture of how, and where SCCs are at, as AMECEA

celebrates Fifty (50) years, of SCCs being church. The strengths and limitations portrayed by findings were a window for pastoral agents (bishops, ordained ministers, the religious and laity) to purposely engage with SCCs. Despite the subtle intricacies that will surface as the church implements recommended changes and improvements, SCCs, are the way to be Church going into the future. The care and support character of the laity by the laity themselves in SCCs cannot be underestimated. The researcher is convinced that through SCCs, the Church with its 2,000+ years of history, will represent Christ more effectively; to offer hope to the world today. May the Holy Trinity Grant the Church all the graces needed to succeed in this noble endeavour.

### 5.3 Recommendations

These research findings confirmed that, “Being my brother's keeper, my sister's keeper” is possible through SCCs. This is a gospel value recaptured, which the Church must not allow to slip through cracks. SCCs consist of families with eager longing to serve if only they are empowered. The researcher urges the Church leadership to prioritize formation of the laity; to re-affirm the role of parents and of family in the formation of faith and morals, urges all who have researched on various aspects of the Church in Africa to share their knowledge with the laity, through SCCs, let the “shepherd smell like its sheep”<sup>82</sup>.

The Parish Priests were said to be in charge of all SCCs under a given Parish. That is a huge responsibility. The researcher urges Parish Priests to be team players. Parishioners are always happy to be involved. Some SCC members have expert power, be humble enough to request/invite them to serve. A conflict in a SCC was sighted due to member inability to raise funds required by the parish. This is a microcosm of many more conflicts due to money. The researcher recommends that parishes and their SCCs find morally acceptable alternatives/ self-sustaining initiatives to supplement parish needs. Material poverty is real; however, lack should not cause some of the faithful to feel excluded or to opt out. Let us help the faithful to remain part of the family.

Care of the environment can be encouraged to become a lifestyle through SCCs. This will improve health in families and SCCs will learn how to responsibly steward mother Earth so it can sustain us.

Last but not least, the researcher invites all for will read this document, to share it with a friend, and to watch out for LUMKO Pastoral Programs on-line and on-radio in the near future. Blessings.

<sup>80</sup> Two, March 2024

<sup>81</sup> <https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2017-47667-001.html>

<sup>82</sup> [Pope urges researchers on social issues to smell like sheep - Vatican News](#)

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