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## **The African Family from the Experience of a Catholic Couple in Ethiopia**

**By Abel Muse and Tenagnework Haile**

### **Abstract**

Africans should preserve the noble family life, traditions and cultures that they inherited from their forefathers. They need to exercise it and live it for themselves rather than imitating the culture and living style of others. Each African country has its unique tradition and culture that some may not perceive as their riches. But when these values are observed from the outside they are very much appreciated and very much liked. Each African country should look at its inner richness, keep it and make it grow. There are some harmful traditional practices that need to be tackled in a way that assures the betterment of the citizens.

This article treats the situation of the African family today, the two authors' personal experience as a Catholic couple with three children in Ethiopia, Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in an Ethiopian context, pastoral recommendations for families and marriage at the October, 2015 Synod of Bishops and the authors' future plans as a Catholic family.

### **1. Reflections on the African Family Today**

#### **a. How is the African family today?**

Our reflections on African family does not give a full picture of the continent, but we would like to share few things about the African family today. Africa is a continent with enormous and diversified rich cultures and life styles. The continent is rich with a

lot of resources. There is good opportunity for its people if there can be good leadership where people can enjoy the common good together.

**b. What are the opportunities for African families?**

African families have rich and noble cultural values where families help each other, live together and take part in all social, political and economic affairs in times of difficulties and joys. Wedding celebrations and other social activities become part of the community and are shared in common. Guests are welcomed at any time without prior appointment. Sharing meals with those who do not have something to eat. Sharing from the little things we have. There is hope for African families because the situation in many countries is changing and improving. Good governance, democracy, opportunity for education and development is emerging.

**c. Some of the challenges that African families face**

All available evidence shows Africa to have been the cradle of human life. This is the greatest gift Africa has given to the world. Africa has been an admired continent in fighting the hostile environment in order for its people to survive. There was a time when Africa was self-reliant. The Creator adorned it with wonderful riches. Yet contemporary Africa is the “sick” continent of the world as explained by Peter Kanyandago in *Marginalized Africa: An International Perspective*.<sup>1</sup> Many African countries have suffered and still suffer as a result of war, ethnic conflicts, poverty, social, political and economic problems, human trafficking, migration, disease, etc. This has created instability and insecurity where families are not able to enjoy peace and live together in harmony and unity.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Kanyandago (ed.), *Marginalized Africa: An International Perspective*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2002, p. 54.

**d. Polygamy**

In some of the African countries polygamy is exercised and takes place mostly in rural areas. In some African countries polygamy is seen positively because it is believed that it creates multiple alliances with different families that also can have a stabilizing effect on the institution of marriage. But it is not true because women are very much oppressed and they are the first victims to carry the burden. Husbands go to different wives turn by turn while wives remain alone until their turn comes. There is no an opportunity for the women of polygamous unions to enjoy life. Also it gives a bad example to the young generation where young men have a tendency of having two or three girlfriends at a time.

**e. Abortion**

In the past in Africa having many children has been considered as wealth and a blessing from the Creator, but in the contemporary Africa it is becoming like a curse. Many families are not willing to bring up children because of the poverty that prevents them from feeding their children. This can lead them to have abortions. This situation gives a way for many clinics to provide abortions at all age levels. In many parts of the continent there are billboards written “Mothers and Children Health Care” but inside the curtain the picture is different from what is written outside. It is a place where thousands of innocent children lose their lives without any protection from the mother or other concerned bodies. Some children are thrown to the roadside hoping that someone will pick them up. In this case there are thousands of orphans in our African nations that create a huge social problem.

**f. What should be done for the future?**

The Catholic Church needs to urge the governments and people of good will in different countries of Africa that God given lives should be respected. Enhance adequate knowledge and teaching about the sanctity of marriage. All leaders of our nations should come up with a good heart and think of their people and work together with church institutions to protect families. If there are no families there are no children, if there are no children there are no nations. The family is the core for all humanity. In Ethiopia we are blessed by having Cardinal Berhaneyesus Demerew Souraphiel, CM, the Archbishop of Addis Ababa, as the second Cardinal of Ethiopia and now also the Chairman of AMECEA.<sup>2</sup> He supports family values very much.

## **2. Our Personal Experience as a Catholic Couple with Three Children in Ethiopia**

We are a Catholic family in Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. Mrs. Tenagnework Haile (wife) is directress of a private elementary school and Mr. Abel Muse (husband) is the Family Life and Laity Ministry Program Coordinator at the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat (ECS). We are blessed with three boys and celebrated our 25<sup>th</sup> Silver Jubilee Wedding Anniversary on 15 February, 2014.

After doing my pastoral studies in Eldoret, Kenya I was assigned as trainer of catechists in Meki Diocese, Ethiopia. That was the time I approached Tenagnework Haile to marry her. She comes from a strong Orthodox family where her father built St.

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<sup>2</sup> AMECEA is an acronym for "Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa." It is a service organization for the National Episcopal Conferences of the nine English-speaking countries of Eastern Africa, namely Eritrea (1993), Ethiopia (1979), Kenya (1961), Malawi (1961), South Sudan (2011), Sudan (1973), Tanzania (1961), Uganda (1961) and Zambia (1961). The Republic of South Sudan became independent on 9 July, 2011, but the two Sudans remain part of one Episcopal Conference. Somalia (1995) and Djibouti (2002) are Affiliate Members. AMECEA is one of the eight Regional Episcopal Conferences of SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar).

Michael Church for the public. We came to an agreement and together with her family prepare to get married in the Catholic Church.

**a. Family meetings and union**

Every procedure went accordingly to the Ethiopian culture where the future husband sends the elders to the family of a girl to bring a big pot filled with pure honey, a blanket embroidered locally, cloth for parents and family members of the girl and cash worth two thousand birr. A golden chain with a cross is presented and then afterwards it is given to the girl. After having the Ethiopian cultural ceremony we attended pre-marriage preparation lessons in the church and got married in the Cathedral of Addis Ababa Archdiocese in 1989.

**b. What about our life afterwards?**

As husband and wife we came to understand that we are one body, not two anymore as it is written in *Genesis 2:24*: “They shall become one flesh.” This has remained deep within us. Over the years life was not as smooth as we thought it would be. There were ups and downs, hardships in our daily life, but by the grace of God we tried to overcome them and celebrated the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary year of our wedding. We hope to celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary if God is willing. As parents with three children we have time for open discussion, share ideas and as a family we pray together.

**c. Our contribution to the Catholic Church and Society**

Mrs. Tenagnework is a member of the Holy Savior Catholic Women Association and takes part in sharing the Word of God and praying together. She contribute money to the needy. She serves as a Lector to read the Word of God in church on Sundays. As directress of a private junior secondary school grade (1-8) she states:

As directress I have the opportunity to advise and counsel the young to develop good moral behavioral change. There are number of students who have problems in their families like broken families and orphans who are desperate and have no interest in education and also create a problem fighting with other students. Such students are given close attention, love and follow up by providing proper counseling. Those who receive counseling have shown good behavioral change. Some have even become good examples for other peers and the community. What I could learn from this experience is to educate and shape the young with good moral behavior and fear of God. One should commit himself/ herself and give time for the good of others without hesitation. Good leadership is important in any institution where people with problems or in different situations could be helped.

So my area of interest is help people especially the young and teens. In this case we can have good citizens who will be responsible for their country and also help their brothers and sisters. African families should be responsible and take care of their children. Children are God-given blessings; they have to have due attention and should not be deprived of their rights.

Mr. Abel Muse has many responsibilities in the Catholic Church. He serves as Chairman of the Holy Savior Parish Laity Council and is the National Coordinator for Family, Youth and Laity Ministry at Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat.

As husband and wife we help needy children and orphans for their education with school materials and uniforms. Trying to witness the faith in our deeds we contribute to the church's needs.

### **3. Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in an Ethiopian Context**

“Small Christian Communities” as they are experienced in other parts of the AMECEA Region are not well known and understood in Ethiopia. The Catholic Church in Ethiopia has eight different terms (alphabetically) with their different meanings and interpretations:

- Bible Sharing Group
- Bible Study Group
- Extended Family Together



- *Mahber*<sup>3</sup>
- Small Apostolic Group
- Small Christian Community (SCC)
- Small Prayer Group
- Small Village Prayer Group

*Mahber* is particularly important. We are members of a *Mahber* called the Sacred Heart Association in Holy Savior Parish in Addis Ababa. The *Mahber* should not be seen in conflict with, or opposition to, a SCC. We are very much impressed by the ministry of building SCCs. The Catholic Church needs to be empowered and built on a solid foundation so the establishment of SCCs is the best strategy.<sup>4</sup>

The AMECEA Laity Meeting in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 2014 was very good. We made strong recommendations of promoting Small Christian Communities (SCCs) where they are active and establishing them in the countries where they are not active and not existing. If SCCs would be there, families would have be strengthened. SCCs are the basis for building up the Catholic Church. In Ethiopia we too have to work actively on SCCs.<sup>5</sup>

#### **4. Pastoral Recommendations for Families and Marriage at the October, 2015 Synod of Bishops**

Families have a significant role in the life of the church and society. Good families build strong community where people love each other and live together

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<sup>3</sup>As a Case Study a *Mahber* called the Sacred Heart Association met on Friday, 14 February, 2014 (the first Friday of the Month following the Ethiopian Calendar) in Holy Savior Church in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. There were 43 participants: 28 women and 15 men. After participating in the Geez Mass in the main church, people gathered in one of the parish halls for a talk on the Gospel by the parish priest and discussion and planning led by the *Mahber* leaders. This was followed by a simple meal (*agape*). In the afternoon there was eucharistic adoration in the main church.

<sup>4</sup> Explained at length in Joseph Healey, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* that is available as a free Ebook containing 600 pages as of 11 April, 2015 on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at:

<http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/ebooks/47-ebooks-.html>  
[http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build\\_new.pdf](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

in harmony. The Catholic Church by Her divinely-given ministry should be aware of the signs of the time and play a leadership role to teach families about their vocation, the value of family life, dignity of the human person and their co-creation with God. Here are some Pastoral Recommendations for the the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome in October, 2015 on *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World.*”

- To strengthen families in their faith there should be ongoing biblical study and prayer programs at family level.
- Pre and post marriage preparation lessons should be given in depth so that families fully understand the sacrament of marriage.
- Parents need to be taught the methodology of how to bring up their children with good moral behavior.
- Families need to be provided adequate information about current situations that challenges family life and show them the direction on how to tackle these challenges.
- Teach families about the importance of SCCs and guide them to take part in SCCs where they can share the Word of God, pray together, love each other and enrich their spirituality.
- Help families to deepen their spirituality by availing themselves of adequate knowledge on the *Bible*, church teaching and family issues.
- Ongoing formation program on family issues should be developed at all parochial levels.
- Teach families to keep and sustain the existing good cultural family life values incorporating Gospel teachings and help parents to pass on these values to their children.
- Let families be given a chance to take part in different big church events like World Conferences and Synods so that they can share and contribute their experiences regarding family issues.
- Encyclicals and Catholic Church Teaching on family issues need to be prepared and addressed to families at the grassroots level.
- Let Universal Catholic Church family lessons be prepared and adopted according to the local situation and addressed to the families.
- Let each National Bishops Conference organize a day of family meetings and celebrations.

##### **5. Our Future Plan as a Catholic Family**

We will continue to render our service to the Catholic Church and help the needy, poor, widows, orphans and elders who are without any help. We will take part actively in SCCs. We will help young people to understand the meaning of marriage and help married couples with problems (counseling). We will give time to prayer and *Bible* sharing. We will teach Catechism to children in the parish and visit the sick. We will try to be an exemplary family.

We thank God for his mercy and blessings!

Mr. Abel Muse, an Ethiopian born in 1958 in Shoa, Southern region of Ethiopia is married to Mrs. Tenagnework Haile and has three boys. He is the second son in the family and has three brothers and four sisters. His parents are farmers and live in a rural area from where he used to walk three hours a day to the nearest school to study in primary and secondary school. He did his primary school at St. Joseph Catholic School Taza Durame from 1965-1973 and secondary school at Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Durame Grade 7-10 and Grade 11-12 at Shashemane Secondary School 1981-1982. After completing my secondary school in Ethiopia he went to Kenya, Eldoret, Pastoral Institute of AMECEA and studied Pastoral Theology. Returning to Ethiopia he worked in the Diocese of Meki as trainer of the catechists of the diocese. In 1989 he joined the Addis Ababa University and studied Educational Administration and graduated with a Diploma in 1993. In 1997-2000 he studied in St. Mary's University College and graduated with a BA in Educational Administration. He currently works for the Ethiopian Catholic Secretariat (ECS) and the Ethiopian Episcopal Conference as the National Coordinator of the Family and Laity Ministry Department. Additionally he is the former Chair of the National Laity Council.

Mrs. Tenagnework Haile is an Ethiopian born on March 17, 1969 in Shoa, Southern region of Ethiopia. She is married to Abel Muse. Her parents are Orthodox believers and are farmers and live in a rural area. She completed her primary and secondary school at St. Joseph Catholic School Taza Durame and secondary school at Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) Durame grade 7-10, and Grade 11-12 Shashemane Secondary School. After completing her secondary school she joined Beza University College, Addis Ababa and graduated in Accounting. The next year she attended the New Generation University College, Addis Ababa, and graduated with a BA Degree in Business Administration. She currently runs a private junior secondary school grade (1-8) as directress. In the future she hopes to publish articles on "Child Care and the Methodology of How to Bring up Children with Good Moral Behavior" and "Responsible Parenthood."

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**Family in the Context of Evangelization**  
*Challenges and Opportunities from Sub-Saharan Africa*

**By Mbiribindi Bahati Dieudonné, SJ**

**Abstract:** *From the present- situation, marriage and family bring new challenges at a time of unprecedented social and theological change. The changes that occur in the post-modern society continue to have remarkable influences on the ideal of family from the Christian perspective and the crisis that families face on the ground, generating concrete contradictory experiences. Because the facts on the ground reveal to us new realities, there is need for the Church to rethink and redefine new pastoral methodologies and responses to the situation of the family. These responses presuppose, first, a contextual analysis, and then a spiritual attitude followed by a pastoral methodology which aims at re-discovering the primordial vocation of marriage: the call to love like Jesus in” charity and clarity”. To face these challenges, opportunities have arisen from a reconsideration of what constitutes the pattern of a traditional African family in a sub-Saharan Africa. Our approach is contextual in the sense of inter-cultural theology in dialogue between the universal message of the Gospel regarding family, the contemporary situation about family and African culture as a response to the Relatio Synodi for the forthcoming and final phase of the Synod on the Family.*

**Introduction**

The German idealistic philosopher Georges Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* states that family<sup>6</sup> is specifically characterized by love which is mind's feeling of its own unity<sup>7</sup>. This unity, source of socialization starts from the human desire to *be with* and ends in a movement toward membership and community. For Hegel, just as the individual is shown to be immanently contradictory, in terms of membership – as both self-sufficient and dependent upon others – so-is the

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<sup>6</sup> By “family” we mean the network of relationship established by birth, marriage or artificial birth of adoption

<sup>7</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991) Third Part: Ethical Life I: The Family. For him the concept of family is completed in these three phases: (a) Marriage, the form assumed by the concept of the family in its immediate phase; (b) Family Property and Capital (the external embodiment of the concept) and attention to these; (c) The Education of Children and the Dissolution of the Family (§ 160). See also Hegel, *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, trans. G. V. Mueller, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959),§370

family<sup>8</sup>. Hence in a family, one's frame of mind is to have self-consciousness of one's individuality within this unity as the absolute essence of oneself. As a result one is in it not as an independent person but as a member<sup>9</sup>. In reality, this understanding of family is really the projection of an ideal rather than an empirical reality. Beyond this idealistic view, we can observe on the ground, however, that there are many characteristics of contemporary societies that puzzle us with regard to the challenges faced by families. This calls us for flexibility, adaptation, pastoral care and contextual responsive descriptions. And just as the relationships between spouses vary greatly today, so do those in families<sup>10</sup>.

It is in that line that Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* has emphasized that “The family in the modern world, as much as and perhaps more than any other institution, has been beset by the many profound and rapid changes that have affected society and culture.”<sup>11</sup> In the midst of those changes, one can ask if the family remains “a school of humanity”, to repeat the expression of Vatican Council II, in its pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, 52. What really needs to be restored? We can also observe that being both a social and Christian structure, the family continues to face new changes, both positive and negative<sup>12</sup>, mutations due to economic progress, sexual-moral revolution, techno-

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> William Johnson Everett, *Blessed be the Bond : Christian Perspective on Marriage and Family* (London: University Press of America, 1990), 5

<sup>11</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, Apostolic exhortation, on the role of the Christian family in the modern world, 1981 (Introduction)

<sup>12</sup> “The situation in which the family finds itself presents positive and negative aspects: the first are a sign of the salvation of Christ operating in the world; the second, a sign of the refusal that man gives to the love of God” (John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, Apostolic exhortation, on the role of the Christian family in the modern world, n<sup>o</sup>6),

scientific development, cultural ideologies and laws which are created to reinforce individualism and to keel the spiritual meaning of love and partnership, increasing in the society the monadic tendency as well as the egocentric bent instead of sharing life. Indeed, bonds are replaced by boundaries<sup>13</sup>.

It is, however, to the families affected by this change that the Church must bring the unchangeable and ever new Gospel of Jesus Christ, just as it is the families involved in the present conditions of the world that are called to accept and to live the plan of God that pertains to them<sup>14</sup>. Aware of this responsibility or *munus* entrusted to the Church, Pope Francis decided to convoke a synod, as the Church's response to the challenges of family/marriage in the context of evangelization<sup>15</sup>. Responding to his call, the fathers of the Synod, in their extraordinary assembly, have raised some important questions regarding the situation of family in a modern society in the document entitled *Relatio Synodi*. They approach family challenges in a contextual and methodological analysis: see-discern-act.

### **Evangelical discernment: See-discern-Act**

From the Christian perspective, marriage is instituted by God, an institution that God intends and promises to sustain<sup>16</sup>. As a holy state, marriage is also a sacred calling and makes visible the love between Christ and the Church. Its symbolic nature calls into

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<sup>13</sup> Hubert Anderson and Robert Cotton Fite, *Becoming married* : Family in pastoral perspective, 74

<sup>14</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, , n°4

<sup>15</sup> The third extraordinary assembly of the synod of Bishop was convoked by Pope Francis on 8 October 2013. Bishops were invited to consider the Pastoral challenges of the Family in a Context of Evangelization. The preparatory document whose results are presented in the *Instrumentum Laboris* published on 26 of June, also contain the contribution from the people of God. The first stage of the work was supposed to examine and analyze the information, testimonies and recommendations received from particular churches in order to respond to the new challenges of the family. The interpretation we are presenting here is based on the documents produced after the first session, the *Relatio Synodi*.

<sup>16</sup> Hubert Anderson and Robert Cotton Fite, *Becoming married*: Family in pastoral perspective, 141

mind the element of sacrament, covenant, communion, friendship, discipleship<sup>17</sup>. Above all, there is love which binds married people together in perfect harmony (Colossians 3:14). Becoming married for Christians is about forming a marital bond of love, in other words a *marital habitus*<sup>18</sup> in sense of living and being together in a family life by living the Gospel of life (*Evangelium Vitae*).

Nevertheless marriage in the context of modernity brings with it new challenges at a time of unprecedented social and theological change<sup>19</sup>. This change in patterns of Christian marriage has become a focus of controversy, a subject of redefinition. The listening Church<sup>20</sup>, the gathering for a synod in October 2014, tried to rethink the theology of marriage and family in so far as it speaks positively and meaningfully to people's experience in the contemporary world. Such kind of theology might have as point of departure loyalty to Jesus Christ, loyalty to the Bible, loyalty to experience, loyalty to culture and finally, loyalty to people of God<sup>21</sup>.

What emerges from this loyalty led the Church in the extraordinary assembly of bishop, from 5<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> of October 2014, to engage a consideration of the pastoral challenges of family in the context of evangelization. Bishops adopted the method of see, discern and act to question the social cultural context of family in God's salvific plan, by raising the pastoral perspectives appropriated. This simple method helped the fathers of the synod to stand back and reflect on family before projecting action, moved by

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<sup>17</sup> William Johnson Everett, *Blessed be the Bond: Christian Perspective on Marriage and Family*, 29

<sup>18</sup> Hubert Anderson and Robert Cotton Fite, *Becoming married: Family in pastoral perspective*, 151

<sup>19</sup> Adrian Thatcher, *Marriage after Modernity* ( New York: Universal Press, 1993)

<sup>20</sup> Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *A Listening Church: Autonomy and communion in African Churches*, (Maryknoll, USA: Orbis Books, 1996).

<sup>21</sup> Adrian Thatcher, *Marriage after Modernity*, 30.



important questions in a sort of “evangelical discernment<sup>22</sup>”: What are we seeing when we look at the situation of family today? What is happening in our modern society with regard to family life? How can it be justified? Is it right? How does our Christian faith respond to it? What does the Gospel tell us? What is the opinion of the Church? Can this be different? What changes do we really need? What are the Catholic responses and actions as pertains to what is happening when we look with the eyes of the heart at the pastoral challenges of family today? This method prompted the Fathers of the synod to reflect deeply. It required that they see the inner experience of married people, listen to the inner voice of God’s presence in families’ experience, look at how Christ speaks about family and name the pastoral experience that the Church needs. For the fathers of the synod, this examination and analysis which were done as a spiritual experience of discovery, lead necessary to pastoral solution and care<sup>23</sup>.

Our contributions to the understanding of this document will be to re-examine the situation of family, to suggest pastoral solution and to reconstruct a model of family which can respond to the salvific plan of God through the paradigm of African conception of marriage and family. For a contextual theology it is unconceivable to discuss family patterns without assessing the issue of marriage. Our main interest is to portray the changes which are taking place in marriage from which information can be derived on the changes that have so far been encountered.

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<sup>22</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, no4

<sup>23</sup> Pastoral care: When the Church speaks about pastoral care, it is most fundamentally about a ministry or a service of accompaniment that the Church, like a pastor and a shepherd, provides. In this sense the main idea of pastoral care refers also to counseling, visitation, advice, formation, training which is about serving, caring, supporting.

Our first point will be an interpretation of the document *Relatio Synodi* by presenting its main ideas. Then our second target is to discover, uncover and recover the pastoral solution needed for the care of the family today. Lastly, we shall listen to the living experience of the family and its realities in the context of the Sub-Saharan Africa, in such a way that it enlightens challenges and completes elements provided in the *Relatio Synodi*. This third target is a reconstructive approach, opening opportunities.

## 1. CHALLENGES

### **Critical Approach: Listen to the Context and Challenge of Family**

The situation of family in the world reveals an experience of both joy and difficulties and hopes<sup>24</sup>. This led the fathers of the synod to recognize the hand of God in the family-experience and thank Him for his constant assistance. It is true that God has been really generous and faithful by helping families to face trials. Indeed, for the fathers of the synod, even though crises still exist, “the desire to marry and form a family remains vibrant”, and the family remains an essential agent in the work of evangelization<sup>25</sup>. It is for this reason that Pope Francis called upon the synod of bishops to reflect upon the critical and invaluable reality of the family in a manner which is spiritual and pastoral. This means listening to the context and challenge of the family today in its complexity. It is about rediscovering the beauty and the dignity of the family, its light and shadows<sup>26</sup>. Such an approach allowed the bishops to point out some challenges, mainly a lack of a greater freedom of expression and a better recognition of

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<sup>24</sup> “*Relatio Synodi*” of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: Pastoral Challenges to the Family in a context of Evangelization”, ( 5-19 October 2014), 18. 1.2014

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 3

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid*, 4

the rights of women and children, the growth of individualism which deforms family bonds which ends up considering each component of family as an isolated unit, the crisis of faith, the culture of loneliness, the problem of unemployment which discourages the young from marrying, the abandonment of families by institutions, the questions of arranged marriages, mixed marriages, baptism and upbringing of children from intermarriages, as well as the virus of relativism, religious indifference, and cohabitation<sup>27</sup>.

This led the fathers of the synod to consider the inevitable consequences which arise from such experience: the increased number of children born out of wedlock, the question of divorce, the increase in the number of children who are victims of break-ups marriages, the discrimination endured by women in some particular cultures where people continue to practice genital mutilation, as well as the existence of marital violence, and the phenomenon of street-children<sup>28</sup>. On the other hand, there is really a feeling that some relationships are easily broken simply because of a strong sense of individualism and the temptation to selfishness. This also makes weak the affective life in a family since the growth in marital maturity is faced by the spread of pornography and the commercialization of the body motivated by a popular dimension of prostitution which destroys affective and sexual maturity<sup>29</sup>. For the fathers of the synod, it is a fact that this movement and influence are due to the reign of a culture of hedonism whereby people's focus is in present pleasure because they have lost the hope for the future<sup>30</sup> as well as the conviction that human person comes from God, and consequently he is called

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<sup>27</sup>*Ibid*, 5-6

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*.6

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*,7

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*,8

to return to God as his ultimate goal and finality. It is only by rediscovering the hunger of God in the middle of despair that can help families in such a context to experience the Christian message as something which contains the reality and dynamic of mercy in need to rebuild the vocation and divine nature of the family.

For Pope Francis, such a rediscovery presupposes that families, “in order to walk among contemporary challenges, there should be a decisive condition to maintain fixed gaze in Jesus Christ, to pause in contemplation and adoration of his face”, and through that to return to the source of the Christian experience, new paths, undreamed-of possibilities<sup>31</sup>. It is only through going back to the source that families can rediscover the original covenant at the very heart of marriage when God by his saving grace, intended to create human being as both man and woman, and to place them in the middle of the garden by blessing their union ( Gen 2: 27). At the same time, the Church is invited to renew the way she looks at the situation of family today by emphasizing more on spiritual dimensions and pastoral solutions. She has, according to the fathers of the synod, to look at the family like Jesus did, without condemnation but with care, kindness, tenderness and compassion<sup>32</sup>.

When the family situation is looked at in this sense, we can see its original face: the domestic Church. Such a look aims at reaffirming the indissoluble union between man and woman (Mat 19:8), as well as the necessity to journey with broken families experiencing crises. Jesus’s example has to be a paradigm for the Church (Jesus with a woman caught in adultery, with the Samaritan woman). His heart is full of compassion

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*,9

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*,9

and mercy, so should be the heart of the Church when facing several disappointments and unfaithfulness experienced in many families today. Like Jesus, the mission of the Church is not just to support and tolerate the weakness of families in crisis. Furthermore, she has also to lead them to repentance and conversion (Go and sin no more)<sup>33</sup>. What does this mean? It means that by imitating the salvific action and words of Jesus, the Church is called to work for the salvation of families and participate at the same time in the redemptive work of Jesus. It is a mission of restoration and reconciliation, a mission which helps families to understand the union which exists among family members in the light of the mystery of the Holy Trinity<sup>34</sup>, a communion of love and sharing. It is exactly in this line, that we realize why the pastoral constitution, *Gadium et Spes*, devoted an entire chapter to promote the dignity of marriage and family (*Gadium et Spes*, 47-52) by placing love at the center of the family, an experience which manifests the truth of love according to the divine plan<sup>35</sup>.

It is here that we must underline how to rediscover and to place love at the center of marriage and the family bond, for the fathers of the synod implied an effort to promote human love which is able to purify and fulfil the perfection of love which only helps married people to love one another like Jesus loved his disciples and from there to make their union to be the Body of Christ. This leads us to assert that it is this union of love which strengthens the family bond and makes it the domestic Church (*Lumen Gentium* 11) in the spiritual and physical sense. One must emphasize here that true love (*Caritas in Veritate*, 44) which Christ is a foundation reveals the love of God to humanity in Christ.

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<sup>33</sup>Relatio Synodi” of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishop : Pastoral Challenges to the Family in a context of Evangelization”,10

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*,12

This is what makes a family to be an icon of the covenant between God and his people<sup>36</sup> as experienced in the history of salvation. In his encyclical *Lumen Fidei*, Pope Francis calls this the vocation of love. By becoming the icon of God's love to his people, the family responds properly to its vocation to love and become witness of love, faith and hope in a despairing society. Through this experience, couples can freely engage in a promise of total self-giving, faithfulness and openness to new life<sup>37</sup>. Helped and sanctified by the grace of the sacrament, families in reality still need the assistance and guidance of the Church in order to remain faithful to their call and vocation to love. For this reason, the fathers of the synod thought about a way of pastoral care as the Catholic response to the challenges of families, looking at Jesus<sup>38</sup>.

### **Reconstructive Approach: The Pastoral Response of the Church**

We have already mentioned that pastoral care must lead to the understanding of marriage and family life in the light of grace, since the couple cannot reach a holy state of life without divine assistance<sup>39</sup>. The acceptance of this assistance implies that even divorced and remarried couples or others people who simply live together are welcomed by the Church to experience the mercy of God which gives them courage to continue serving the Church, to participate in the life of Christian community and to share the mission of the Church by participating fully in the life of the Church<sup>40</sup>. It is through that experience of grace that trials can be overcome and lead to a sacramental and official celebration of marriage. In this sense, children also are taken into consideration as

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*,13

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*,14

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*,15

<sup>39</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, n°22

<sup>40</sup> "Relatio Synodi" of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishop : Pastoral Challenges to the Family in a context of Evangelization", ( 5-19 October 2014),17

oftentimes they are wounded and shocked by some situations of divisions within the family; this implies that children need special attention. The fathers of the synod discussed in this regard about how the Church can face the situation of problematic unions and provide pastoral responses to them. Using the statement of Saint Paul in his letter to the Ephesians (4 :15), they came to the conclusion that the pastoral attitude of the Church could be one that is inspired by the charity of a mother and the clarity of the teacher in faithfulness to the mercy displayed in Christ's self-giving (*Kenosis*).

What is required here is to touch both the healing of the wounded marriages and their conversion, to invite the family to respond to its fundamental vocation to holiness by proclaiming the Gospel of truth. More clearly, it is about inviting family to keep the communion with the Church by the help of the word of God, source of life for the family. For this reason, in the process of preparing a couple to enter into the sacramental life of marriage, it is necessary for the Church to journey with both men and women, by helping them to understand Christian marriage as a vocation which is undertaken with due preparation in a journey of faith with a proper process of discernment which should be considered neither as a merely cultural tradition nor social or legal requirement<sup>41</sup>. Such a call implies that the Church builds pastoral practice in the light of the Gospel of the family, by training priests and other pastoral agents to accompany the family in this journey. This means also that, although it is important to prepare those who will get married, the Church should not ignore that this preparation demands the involvement of all for quality. Furthermore, there should be, according to the fathers of the synod, an

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<sup>41</sup>Relatio Synodi” of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishop : Pastoral Challenges to the Family in a context of Evangelization”, 21

established “programs which create a true experience of participation in ecclesial life and systematically treat the various aspects of family life”,<sup>42</sup>integrating liturgy, devotional practices and Eucharist (celebration) for entire families.

More specifically the synod encourages a dialogue of guidance. The Church should be able to enter into a pastoral dialogue with the couples in need of assistance and help them by encouraging them to regularize illegitimate unions. It is also good to encourage dialogue of understanding between the Church and the civil law and between the Church and culture. This is because some cultures encourage *ad experimentum* unions for either financial reasons or by deliberate choice. For that entire situation, the synod suggested a constructive way of seeking to transform them into opportunities which can lead to actual marriages in conformity with the Gospel<sup>43</sup>. Such transformation can be understood in the light of forgiveness whereby broken families accept to receive God’s strength and support to face the wounds and sufferings created by divorces and separations.

In the midst of such experience, the Church, acting like Jesus on the way to Emmaus,<sup>44</sup>should continue to journey with the divorced and help them to rediscover the way back to rediscover their first love. This is what the fathers of the synod called the art of accompaniment, full of respect and humility<sup>45</sup>. The aim in this journey is to promote reconciliation, mutual understanding, forgiveness and restoration. Special attention should also be given to single-parent families by designating special pastors full of compassion and counselors who can offer free advice and proper direction that

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<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 22

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 24

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 25

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 27



rejuvenates the situation. This is a matter of solicitude, particularly when children are involved and affected by such situations.

Although it appeared difficult for the fathers of the synod to allow the divorced and remarried couples to access the sacraments of penance and communion – since there is a relationship between participating in the Eucharist and communion with the Church – they nevertheless encouraged couples who are in this situation to enter in a sort of “spiritual communion” with the Church<sup>46</sup>. The same attention and care should be provided by the Church in a context where gay and lesbian couples are concerned. Basically, without discrimination, the type of accompaniment needed here presupposes the openness to understand and embrace with care each person in need of assistance, but at the same time, work to restore the dignity of family life by witnessing to love<sup>47</sup>. One must emphasize that for the fathers of the synod, it is only through this witness of love that the family can become the agent of evangelization by bearing witness to the truth, the way and the life which comes from God and which is suggested as a way of perfection in the light of the Gospel of truth and Charity<sup>48</sup>. It is important to emphasize here the witness expected of married people. The primary purpose of marriage is to serve God and the Kingdom of God. Marriages are key partners with the Church in responding to God’s call to give witness to the divine order. For this reason marriage is an instrument of God’s governance. Therefore, married people are to serve God by transforming the world<sup>49</sup>. The family as a unity is to be considered here as disciple of Christ. This is the mission of family in a context of evangelization in continuity with what was stated in *Familiaris*

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<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 28

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*,32

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*,32

<sup>49</sup> William Johnson Everett, *Blessed be the Bond: Christian Perspective on Marriage and Family*, 76.

*Consortio*: the Christian family is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth and to bring him or her, through a progressive education and catechesis, to full human and Christian maturity<sup>50</sup>.

Extensive variations in demography, socio-economic structures, and culture cannot obscure the common challenges that have affected Christian families in the last decades. The Christian character as well as the essential function of families, historically, has contributed to the witness of the message of love that Jesus brought to the humanity. This is why, despite the changes taking place in the modern society due to the modernization process, the family – domestic church – still remains not only for Christians but for every person a prominent element which contributes to the integral development of social and Christian life.

Nevertheless, in the *Relatio Synodi* of October 2014, it appears that the fathers of the synod, reflecting from a Christian perspective, seem to have paid little attention to the diversity and change<sup>51</sup> of family patterns<sup>52</sup> from a culture to another. But cultural and ethnic factors are important to the understanding of family's challenge<sup>53</sup>. Thus this second part of our analysis aims at examining two key issues connected with the African family patterns: marriage and family size, with the goal opening opportunities to face these challenges.

## II. OPPORTUNITIES

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<sup>50</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris consortio*, Apostolic exhortation, on the role of the Christian family in the modern world, 1981, n°2

<sup>51</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *What is not sacred : African spirituality*,( Orbis Book, Maryknoll, New York, 2014), 11

<sup>52</sup> Lucy P. Mair, "African Marriage and Social Change," in *Survey of African Marriage and Family Life*, Edited by Arthur Phillips, (London: Oxford University Press, 1953).1 – 177

<sup>53</sup> Hubert Anderson and Robert Cotton Fite, *Becoming married*, 55.

## Contextual Approach: Patterns of Family in Sub-Saharan Africa

Professor Laurenti Magesa in his book, *What is not sacred? African spirituality*, emphasizes that all human beings, as individuals and societies are situated in this ambivalence of a good but imperfect world.<sup>54</sup> The desire to create and build a harmonious society always faces the imperfection of human beings because of the power of evil, vicious attitudes, hatred, jealousy, selfishness, anger, pride, crimes against humanity and nature, in one word, evil<sup>55</sup>. In the context of dramatic social changes, the family pattern in sub-Saharan Africa also faces those challenges. Although the African society cannot be considered as static, uniform and constant society, changes in many African societies affected by modernism are in conflict with some traditional values which protect the family when it is confronted by various challenges: polygamy, polygyny, the arranged marriage, cohabitation and so on. We can see from the *Relatio Synodi* that no reference is given to cultural diversity. The fathers did not even mention the issue of polygamy which characterizes some traditional and modern marriages in Sub-Saharan Africa. But the question of polygamy affects not only the whole theology of marriage but also the new and modern sense of nuclear family.

Whether or not we appreciate factors leading to polygamous marriages, it can be said that monogamy is in theory the ideal and more natural form of marriage in the light of modern knowledge of different aspects of human life<sup>56</sup>. In a context of the traditional culture, societies and life, notes John Mbiti, polygamy however, works happily in some

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<sup>54</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *What is not sacred? African spirituality*, 11

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> John Mbiti, *Love and Marriage in Africa*, 195

cases and fails in other cases<sup>57</sup>. Nevertheless it remains one of the most common patterns of marriage in the Sub Saharan African context. In general, polygamy has first of all to be understood not as a perversity of marriage. Polygamy in an African context implies that a certain number of brothers and sisters share the same father but different mothers and from that nuclear family they build a formidable community<sup>58</sup>. The Church can consider what the experience of this type of marriage is in terms of how children are raised in a family composed of a number of people under the authority of one father and different mothers . In such a nuclear family, there is a kind of socialization (which does not go without conflicts) among the kids who most of the times end-up calling any of their father's wife "my mother" and vice versa. Such kind of family becomes nuclear community which other relatives of the head of the family afterwards join".<sup>59</sup> There is harmony, respect and solidarity among people; conflicts are resolved through the counsel of the elders. Faithfulness to the union accepted freely and integrated as a way of life is considered with great esteem. Can this type of family be also considered a domestic Church?

From the understanding of how polygamy constitutes an important dimension of African marriage, we come to the conclusion that family is an extend reality in African context<sup>60</sup>. It is not only constituted by the man, his wife and children. It is about local unity which involves a multitude of patterns and relationships, something which implies the union and the community with the whole society, the ancestors and the dead of the

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<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Stuart Queen, Robert W. Havenstein, and John B. Adams, "The Polygynous Baganda Family," in *The Family in Various Cultures*. (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1961), 68

<sup>59</sup> Audrey I. Richards, "Bemba Marriage and Present Economic Conditions," *The Rhodes-Livingstone Papers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), 30

<sup>60</sup> Audrey I. Richards, "Bemba Marriage and Present Economic Conditions," *The Rhodes-Livingstone Papers* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), 30

clan. One who breaks this relationship by divorce or physical separation breaks, at the same time, the union with the whole clan. For this reason, family is protected by something more than a promise or a contract. It is protected by the vital union among parents, children, elders, ancestors and goods, a union which is formed by the *Ubuntu*.

When African theologians such as John Mbiti and Laurenti Magesa speak about Ubuntu they refer to a supreme moral value, protector of harmony within the society. The ethics of *Ubuntu* stands on the evidence that in many African cultures there is respect for life: children are treasured, abortion is an abomination. The sacredness of human life is protected by taboos and rituals. There is respect for the dignity of man. Other values like faithfulness, solidarity, hospitality, moderation (only adults might and drink drunkenness is shameful) are sacred. These values shape the moral demands and any attempt of division is perceived in personal and communal dimensions as a sickness which needs healing. However, forgiveness is a process of healing of both individual and community in order to keep the bond. Respect for parents is encouraged and sanctioned is provided by the ancestors. This gives to moral behavior sacredness character—linked to the transcendental values. In Africa the family life inherently is bound together with human life to form a natural harmony”<sup>61</sup>. As such, every day is an occasion of encountering God or the ancestors through piety and worship, giving to the whole African life a sacredness dimension. Marriage and family are also sacred and should be protected against any evil which might create division and separation.

What enables us to recognize, encourage, nurture, and intensify the harmonious relationships in an African family are the traditional rituals. The family is constituted of

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<sup>61</sup> Magesa Laurenti, *What is not sacred*, p.59

both living and dead. *Ubuntu* as harmony is always necessary for Africa to reach its goal of good life. In case this harmony is broken due to hatred, jealousy, selfishness, anger, pride, genocide, there is a need of a spiritual healing both as individuals and as a community, a role played by diviners.

This is what *Ubuntu* brings to the understanding of family. It brings the central role that is played by the elders<sup>62</sup> in the process of reconciliation between people and restoration of broken relationships within a marriage. This ethics of *Ubuntu* tells us that a person is a person only with other persons, alone he is an animal.<sup>63</sup> In Africa, the ethics of togetherness is cultivated and people enjoy eating together. To be human is to establish relationships with others in a family setting, which accomplishes the humanness of any humanity.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

What we should learn from this is that marriages as well as family in an African context “are just accepted as normal rhythm of life through which everyone must go”<sup>64</sup>. In Africa it is through marriage and family that mystery of life is propagated and handed down. Marriage/family allows procreation and makes humankind to be co-creator with God. It is “social hunger” which drives people to create family bonds, to live together so that they can provide to each other with companionship. Family puts an individual in a situation where he/she starts to develop consciousness initially directed toward a partner but afterwards includes parents, children, brothers, sisters, cousins, uncles, neighbors and

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

<sup>63</sup> Relatio Synodi” of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishop : Pastoral Challenges to the Family in a context of Evangelization”, 12

<sup>64</sup> John Mbiti, *Love and Marriage in Africa* (Longman Group Limited, London, 1973), 39.

other relatives and eventually the whole village, creating a network of *corporateness* of life<sup>65</sup>. In this line, the dominant feature of African families is its ability to “make new things out of old,” and to draw forth new solutions from the traditional resources of family institutions<sup>66</sup> by creating a large horizon of interrelationship.

However present day experience calls for change in the family model, inviting the Church, at the same time, to adopt some elements from African experience, something that the Church can take as opportunity to face the challenge of individualism. It can re-value the collective dimension which is common to African traditional society by seeing how it can correct the culture of individualism. It is also possible for the Church to re-emphasize what really traditional marriage can teach modern marriages especially with regard to the values of respect, faithfulness, togetherness and solidarity. Family bonds, in that context, were sustained by the fundamental option of indissolubility and perpetuity. This model can become for the Church an opportunity to face the challenge of divorce, contraception, cohabitation, pornography and infidelity to marital vows. Consequently, the re-orientation of family values from small family sizes to extend families has the advantage of re-enforcing the sense of the large family, a sense of belonging to a large group, so as divorce not only cuts someone from the married bond but also from the community bond. The Church can take into consideration the merit of such model without considering it as a deviation.

Another factor that is undermining kinship-based family structures is the prevalence of single parenthood, particularly among young urban females. As increasing

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<sup>65</sup> John Mbiti, *Love and Marriage in Africa*, 109

<sup>66</sup> Therese Lauras-Lecoh, “Family Trends and Demographic Transition in Africa,” *International Social Science Journal*, vol. 42, no. 4, 1990, p. 489

numbers of women have joined the labor force, single and female-headed households have become a discernible pattern on the African social landscape<sup>67</sup>. The appropriate response to this challenge can also be found in the large family model in which children do not belong only to their parents but to the larger community. In this context, it becomes difficult to speak about single-parents, since the interconnection between families has managed to create a network of relationship, collaboration, mutual support and interdependence. Children are considered as the gifts from God; they are received and are welcomed as fruits of love between parents. Consequently the children do not feel abandoned, rejected and called street children, since they are part of a broad family structure where the feeling of membership overcomes discrimination and exclusion. The Church can consider this model as an opportunity to face such challenges as trial marriages, childlessness, barrenness, and sterility.

## **Conclusion**

The changes that occur in the society will continue to have remarkable influences on the concept of family and pressure between the Christian ideal of family and what is happening on the ground. This calls the Church to re-think and re-define pastoral methodologies and responses to the family. This pastoral response presupposes first a contextual analysis, then a spiritual approach followed by a pastoral care to the vocation of marriage: the vocation to love like Jesus in truth and freedom. To face these challenges, there are opportunities from a reconsideration of what constitutes the pattern of an African traditional family which can inspire the next session of Synod. With John

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<sup>67</sup> P. Antonie and J. Nanitelamio, "More Single Women in African Cities: Pikine, Abidjan, and Brazzaville," *Population*, vol. 3, 1991, 149-69



Mbiti in his book: *Marriage and Love in Africa*, we can conclude with a note of hope: “Married life has its problems but, in spite of them all, it is an infinitely rich and beautiful mystery which cannot be exhausted even by happiest marriages. It is only love in marriage which unfolds the riches and beauty of that mystery. Having unfolded them, love goes on to sustain and crown them”<sup>68</sup>. It is this love which helps married people to overcome their marital problems but also multiplies the joy and happiness of living together as a family.

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<sup>68</sup> John Mbiti, *Love and Marriage in Africa*, 221

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*Notes on the Synodal Document “Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization”*

By Nicholas Hamakalu

The late American film critic, Roger Ebert, advised moviegoers to judge a motion picture not on what it does but rather on what the movie intended to do. Following this counsel, this essay makes an attempt at reviewing the synodal document “*Relatio Synodi*” of the *III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*, not so much on what it should have said, but rather on what the Synod Fathers set out to communicate. Eschewing any pretentiousness of being an authority or a specialist theologian, this task will be made from the point of view of an African man and a student of Theology. To this end, the essay will evaluate the *Relatio Synodi* in terms of its tone on the one hand, and content on the other.

The *Relatio Synodi* was published on 18<sup>th</sup> October 2014 and is the final document of the preparatory Synod, which should serve as the guideline for the definitive synod on the family scheduled for October 2015. The document is divided into three parts: Listening, Looking at Christ and Facing the Situation. Again, each of these sections will be analyzed in terms of tone and content.

### **Preliminary Notes**

It is not an overstatement to claim that the *Relatio Synodi* is a ‘personal’ document for Pope Francis. This is evident first from his convocation of the synod and as well as his insistence that the votes for the various issues addressed during the synod be included in the final document. Certainly, the fate of families is a subject so close to his heart. That the document abounds with ‘politically’ charged words such as “acceptance”, “listening”, and “welcome” reflects something close to a tectonic shift in the Church’s appreciation of the complexity regarding many matters concerning the modern family.

### **Part I: Listening**

The Catholic Church has come a long way! Some observers would claim that with the Second Vatican Council the Church had come of age. Reading this part of the document,

it seems to me that the model of the Church operative in this section is that of Church as a servant. This is illuminative because it is expected, and with good reasons, that the predominant model operative among the Church leaders would be that of church as institution, as Avery Dulles had observed.<sup>69</sup> In the institutional model of the Church, the laity's duty is to listen, to pay and to pray. The *Relatio Synodi* eschews that model and 'distances' itself from it. From the outset it is a breath of fresh air to hear the Synod Fathers acknowledge that they too have to listen, and listen and listen. But listen to whom and to what? The document says that all in the Church have to listen to what the lay people, who have the vocation of family life, are saying. We have to listen to these 'experts' of family – those many men and women who are living out the vocation to marriage and family. Yet the question remains as to whether the Synod Fathers and the Church at large is ready to not only listen and but also hear those voices that might offend their Church's sensitive ears?

### **Tone**

The tone in this part of the document is humble, conscientious and open minded. There is an admission that the Church does not have all the answers. This admission though seems to be made with some hesitancy – a reflection, perhaps, of what Pope Francis would later deplore about Church leaders being too confident of their own importance, moral strength and superior insight.<sup>70</sup> In terms of tone the *Relatio Synodi* is a 'divided' document, perhaps better still an attempt at synthesis: it presents a centrist, interventionist posture between what may be called the liberal views on one end and the consecutive views on the other end regarding the family. More important, in my view, is that the document eschews any hint of triumphalism or claims to monopoly of solutions to all woes confronting the family. What the *Relatio* seems to be saying is that the two lungs of the church, lay and clergy, more than ever, need each other. No one has all the answers. That the Synod Fathers acknowledged that their role is more than dishing out truths to the laity is a breath of fresh air. That age has gone.

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<sup>69</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*. (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1974) p. 16

<sup>70</sup> Cited in Eamon Duffy, "Who is the Pope?" <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2015/feb/19/who-is-pope-francis>. Accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2015

The language is down to earth. It is especially pleasing that the language is not one meant for specialist theologians. If the document is put into the hands of any reader without disclosing the source, one can easily attribute it to any Catholic ‘sociologist’. This simplicity does not diminish the gravity and urgency of the issues it addresses. Some may claim that this down to earth language deprives the document the *gravitas* that is expected from a synodal document. But again the *Relatio* is not meant to be a dogmatic document.

The *Relatio Synodi* is highly readable, a document in sync with the spirit of the times which is characterised by dialogue, openness, ecumenism and pluralism.

### **Content**

If the Fathers are listening, and the *Relatio Synodi* intends to prove that they are, it is an admission that increasingly in many a part of the world, people are suspicious of institutions and the Church is not immune to this suspicion. The institution of marriage and family is under suspicion as well. A hermeneutics of suspicion seems to be characteristic of our age in regards to many institutions, marriage inclusive. This comes out clearly in the *Relatio Synodi*.

It is telling that the first part of *Relatio* is titled “listening”. This is an attempt to go beyond the often held perception that the Catholic Church is an institution that is given to telling people what to do, sometimes maybe even bordering on the oppressive. In the *Relatio Synodi*, the Church is no longer an institution given to dogmatic spoon-feeding and thought control. In this intention the *Relatio Synodi* has succeeded.

What John O’Malley says in his work, *What Happened at Vatican II*, can be appropriately applied to what is happening in the *Relatio Synodi* with regards to the Church hierarchy and laity. With regards to the family and the laity, there is a litany of movement from laws to ideals; from monologue to conversation; from hostility to friendship; from prescriptions to principles.<sup>71</sup> The Church has really gone beyond the schema of pray, pay, and obey. This comes glaringly as *Relatio* talks of listening.

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<sup>71</sup> Eamonn Mulcahy, *Unpublished Notes on Ecclesiology Course* (Nairobi: Tangaza College, 2013), p. 71

This feature of listening is all the more revelatory and pertinent in the context of the African palaver, a space where dialogue is important. In an African palaver, listening is the defining virtue. But the document is a challenge to instances in Africa where children and women are not supposed to speak. The *Relatio* prizes listening even to the ‘least’ members of the family. The *Relatio* can thus serve not to diminish but rather to intensify the African value of the palaver. It is a cry that women and children should no longer be excluded from it, but rather assume their place as active contributors.

Listening has implications. But the document does not give this enough space. To listen means a readiness to learn from the other, even to learn from those voices that may offend the ears of churchmen. It is unfortunate that the Synod Fathers do not link and articulate the learning that comes from listening, especially when it is borne in mind that listening is arguably an essential biblical and theological virtue. I have in mind the significance of the *Shema Yisrael* in the Hebrew Scriptures: “Hear, O Israel” (Deuteronomy 6:4).

In one sense it can be said that the Church is listening, and the *Relatio* is thus a product of that listening going on in the Church. This is also reflected in the observation of the *Relatio* that it is given to “favouring mercy and accommodation”<sup>72</sup> toward ways of understanding marriage and family in the contemporary world.

In the third paragraph under the subheading ‘Listening’, the Synod Fathers articulate particular cultural and religious issues such as “polygamy”, “marriage in stages”, “arranged marriages”, and “mixed marriages”. Reading this I cannot help but think that some of these sentiments might have been brought forward by the Fathers from Africa south of the Sahara. The universal Church seems to be listening and hearing what the church in Africa is saying. What is disheartening is that these issues are ‘glossed’ over and just mentioned in passing, as if not urgent enough to merit further consideration. They seem to have been mentioned by way of discussing much pressing issues, such as matters concerning divorced and remarried Catholics and those in irregular unions, matters largely affecting the church in the global north. It is my hope that those matters of

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<sup>72</sup> Anthony Egan, “Tectonic Plates are Shifting,” *The Tablet*, (18<sup>th</sup> October 2014): p. 6

the global south will not be glossed over in the 2015 synod. At this point mixed marriage can be taken as an illustration of what takes different dynamics in many African contexts. Unlike some parts of the world which can clearly be classified as Catholic or Protestant, in many an African country this categorization does not hold. In a number of African countries, for instance South Africa and Kenya, the number of Catholic Christians is roughly equal to the number of non-Catholic Christians. In such situations, mixed marriages are the rule and not the exception.

Just a little note betrays how much out of touch the document writers may be with contemporary trends. They use the expression “street-children”.<sup>73</sup> This term is so twentieth-century. These days social workers and those working in the streets talk and refer to these children as “children in and on the streets” rather than “street children”. This little point shows how much the church Fathers have to catch up with some issues regarding the family.

This part of the document also betrays what I think is an over preoccupation with matters of the Catholic north. The Synod Fathers decry the decline in population and falling numbers of children being born<sup>74</sup>. But in the Catholic south the story is different. The United Nations projections, for instance, projects that Nigeria by 2045 would surpass the United States of America as the world’s third most populous country<sup>75</sup>. Taking Nigeria as a microcosm of the Catholic south, the Catholic population in this views is bound for an upward movement.

## **Part II: Looking at Christ**

Lest the *Relatio Synodi* be accused of being too sociological and thin on theology, this part of the document is a corrective to that charge. This section is arguably the most theological part of the document.

### **Tone**

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<sup>73</sup> *Relatio Synodi* of the III Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, *Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization*, p. 7

<sup>74</sup> *Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization*, *ibid*, p.8

<sup>75</sup> *Top 20 Countries 2013-2100*. <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/#growthrate>. Accessed 15<sup>th</sup> February 2015

Reading this part of the *Relatio*, what emerges is that the document celebrates a Christology from below. As a sacrament it is assumed that marriage is Christological as all sacraments are a sign of Christ's grace. In this section the *Relatio Synodi* does not break new ground. It reaffirms and endorses what has been taught in magisterial documents of the Church. The doctrines reaffirmed include, among others, the indissolubility of marriage.<sup>76</sup> The tone in this section is in continuity with the accommodative language of *Nostra Aetate*, in which natural marriage is given prominence.<sup>77</sup>

It is encouraging that the Synod Fathers acknowledge that there is no one unified understanding of family – especially with regard to specifics; there is wide disagreement on some of those matters.

## **Content**

In terms of content the *Relatio Synodi* does not break new ground theologically, although it uses much ordinary day language to expound on marriage and family. It is a hermeneutic of continuity that is working here: marriage is biblical; marriage in Christ is raised to the status of sacrament. In a world in which 68.5 % of the population is non-Christian<sup>78</sup>, one would have wished this part of the document to more open minded. In my view this part of the *Relatio* does a poor job in discussing the nature, mission and structure and charism of marriage.

One would have wished that the Synod Fathers would have made connections between the suffering and pain of family life with the passion of Christ in which they find their true completion and meaning. The Synod Fathers may have missed an opportune chance to do catechesis on family and how that family suffering may find its ultimate meaning in the passion with and of Christ. Of course the suffering of families cannot be directly linked to the suffering of Christ. In the former case families do suffer because of

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<sup>76</sup> Pastoral Challenges, *ibid*, p. 10

<sup>77</sup> Pastoral Challenges, *ibid*, p. 15

<sup>78</sup> *The Global Religious Landscape*. <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/>. Accessed on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2015



the sins of their members whilst Christ suffers for sins of the others. Still the in Christ's suffering families may learn what sacrificial love means and entails.

### **Part III: Facing the Situation**

The family is under pressure, but it is also a place of healing, reconciliation and bandaging of wounds. It is expected that this section will give concrete guidelines on the complicated and controversial topics outlined in first part of the document. The Synod Fathers are aware of these pressures and rest their case on the claim that the Church is mother and teacher: "The Church has to carry this [duty] out with the tenderness of a mother and the clarity of a teacher (cf. Ephesians 4:15)."<sup>79</sup>

#### **Tone**

The tone here, as expected, is rather tentative in addition to being accommodative and accepting. Some of the issues identified – violence, financial, cultural and existential complications – do not render themselves to easy solutions.

If I were to give this document a different subtitle, it would not be "Catholic **Teaching**<sup>80</sup> on the Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization", but rather "Catholic **Thinking/Thought**<sup>81</sup> on the Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization". Reading the *Relatio Synodi* feels less like a definitive teaching but rather more like Catholic ruminations on the subject. This section of the *Relatio* oozes with urgency. It is also the longest part of the document. Part one and part two can be seen as setting the scene for this part.

In all the issues addressed here, from irregular unions to the divorced and the remarried, the tone is clearly softer. As one commentator observed "the church does not dismiss as unholy all patterns of family life which are by its standards imperfect, but asks the people involved to take what steps they can towards perfection – which they may never reach for reasons they cannot control."<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Pastoral Challenges, *ibid*, p. 18

<sup>80</sup> Emphasis mine

<sup>81</sup> Emphasis mine

<sup>82</sup> Editorial, "We have division: Now find Unity," *The Tablet*, (18<sup>th</sup> October 2014): p. 2

The wind of caution clearly rears its head in this section. One of the notable and vocal participants of the Synod, Cardinal Burke, cautioned that it was important not to use euphemistic language, but rather to describe things as they are.<sup>83</sup> Yet caution won the day over recklessness and boldness.

## Content

The solutions for family challenges are varied here and I suppose were meant to cover as much ground as possible. Some are biblically based and rooted in tradition. In short they are: Proclamation, Guidance, Accompaniment, Care, Attention, Transmission and Upbringing<sup>84</sup>.

In a sense, the *Relatio* is an ambitious document. It wants to cover as much ground as possible – from helping to find answers to questions relating to single-parent families to the challenges of declining birthrate.

One weakness of the *Relatio* emerges in this section. For a Synod that was headed by a pope from the southern hemisphere, it seemed thin on many of the problems facing the family in the global south. The *Relatio* advises that “it is necessary to accept people in their concrete being.”<sup>85</sup> The concrete being of families in the south includes, among others, direct violence to women and young girls. Many girls are forced into economic and sexual migration and isolation.

## The *Relatio* in the Context of Africa

Inter-marriages are a common occurrence in Africa. It is not uncommon for members of a single family to be both Catholic and Protestant. This fact of the family in Africa really suffers neglect in the *Relatio*. One gets the impression that the *Relatio*'s agenda was set by concerns of the Catholic North.

In many ways, the *Relatio* largely sees marriage and family life through the prism of the northern hemisphere, giving the impression that perhaps the prelates from the

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<sup>83</sup> Christopher Lamb, “Battle Lines are Drawn,” *The Tablet*, (18<sup>th</sup> October 2014), p. 5

<sup>84</sup> Pastoral Challenges, *ibid*, p. 1

<sup>85</sup> Pastoral Challenges, *ibid*, .p

South are not heard enough. Thus the call to listen becomes all the more pertinent. For instance, it can be legitimate to say that marriage in the northern hemisphere is largely an event. In the global south, especially in Africa, marriage is seen as a process – from betrothal, paying bride wealth, living together, having children, civil marriage and, finally, the church wedding.<sup>86</sup> African marriage is essentially communal and has a dynamic character and as such cannot be reduced to one moment of time.<sup>87</sup> Thus the plea for inclusive models of marriage especially with the view that marriage is a process than an event could be also be put on the agenda for 2015 synod.

The communal, collective character of African marriage has also its shadows. Communities may bully a married couple and at times fail to give them their space so that their marriage can blossom. Pressures to sire children, to ‘terminate’ a marriage in which children have not been born, are all too often too strong to resist. Married couples may become the victims of the community and of the collective.

This African model of marriage is clearly at odds with the *Relatio*, especially the so called trial marriages to prove the fertility or fecundity of the woman. As one African theologian opposed to some models of African marriage put it, this damages the bride’s human dignity giving the impression that a woman is only worth anything if she is fertile.<sup>88</sup> Is there a middle ground between this African concept with the Church’s conception of marriage involving mutual affection? The *Relatio* accepts that children are gift from God; it can help to catechize and enrich the African model of marriage as more than involving the bearing of children.

Certainly the *Relatio* is more welcome and accommodative of those ‘irregular’ marriages. This is encouraging. Or is it just embracing the spirit of the age – that is, permissiveness and relativism? The answers to such questions are complex.

Whilst the *Relatio* considers concubinage in the strictest sense, the African point of view on this is rather broad. Concubinage is simply people staying together with no

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<sup>86</sup> Anthony Egan, *ibid*, p. 6

<sup>87</sup> Benezet Bujo, *Plea for Change of Models for Marriage* (Nairobi: Pauline Publications Africa, 2009), p. 92

<sup>88</sup> Laurent Mpongo cited in Bujo, *ibid*, p. 108

intention to marry. African marriages may be labeled concubinage, but in Africa this becomes problematic. The list of irregular marriages and families could have been much longer. Perhaps it was not the Synod Fathers' intention to be exhaustive, but the list should have included more issues from the South, and more so from Africa.

It is said that numbers do not lie. It is illuminating how the Synod Fathers voted, for instance with regard to allowing communion for divorced and remarried Catholics in certain circumstances and on welcoming homosexual persons. On the former, 104 voted for and 74 against. On the latter, 118 voted for and 62 against. As an African I wonder how these percentages would have turned out on issues like polygamy, multi-stage marriages and under-age marriages. Would these have earned more than the 50% as the above typically northern concerns did?

### **Interpretation of the *Relatio Synodi***

What does the magisterium say that the *Relatio* is to be interpreted? Is it rupture? Is it renewal? Is it *aggiornamento* to invoke some words that were used in interpreting the second Vatican Council?<sup>89</sup> In my view, all these three words can legitimately be employed with reference to *Relatio Synodi*.

What emerges from the *Relatio* is the impression that Jesus is presented as always talking of family and marriage in positive, affirmative terms. Jesus's views on marriage and family are, however, rather complex and ambivalent at best: at one point Jesus praises the family; at another Jesus expresses suspicion at the claims that families makes on their members. Bujo cites Mark 3:20 and Mark 3:35-37 where Jesus interrogates the family: father-mother-children. For Jesus family is not all cozy and straightforward. As Bujo puts it, "Jesus is critical where family does not align itself with the will of God and becomes an obstacle to the kingdom of God."<sup>90</sup> The gospels are not so much concerned with the model of family, whether the classic one of father-mother-children. What is the determining factor is whether that model of family becomes an instrument of the furtherance of the kingdom of heaven. This seems to be the litmus test of whether family

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<sup>89</sup> Raniero Cantalamessa, "The Second Vatican Council: 50 years Later – a key to Its Interpretation", <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CHISTORY/zcant2adv12.htm>

<sup>90</sup> Bujo, *ibid*, p, 84

is succeeding or failing. Perhaps that is the measure of genuine family. For instance, can a polygamous family be a vehicle for the furtherance of the kingdom of heaven?

Even the challenges of potency and infertility as impediments to marriage need to be reviewed. Is it possible that a union in which the ‘husband’ is impotent<sup>91</sup> would be a potential avenue of the kingdom of God? Or could a childless marriage, so much disparaged in many parts of Africa, be a vehicle for the furtherance of the kingdom of God? In this view the two-fold ends of marriage, the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of offspring, would be equally given prominence instead of promoting the second (procreation) over the other (mutual good of husband and wife) as happens in many African contexts.

To return to a point made earlier about the communal character of marriage and family, when the *Relatio* mentions about family being womb of the Church, of the faith, and implicitly that the survival of the Church depends on the wellbeing of the family, this resonates with the African view that the survival of the community depends of the survival of family. And just as the *Relatio* makes it plain about the necessity of preparing individuals for marriage, this is in line with the African ethos of prolonged continued preparation for marriage.

## Conclusion

Let us, in conclusion, pose the question, “Did the synod Fathers get it right?” The answer is in the affirmative. Their hearts are in the right place. Credence is to be given to the claim that the language and tone of the *Relatio* is realistic and compassionate. The *Relatio* starts with the realities of everyday life and then proceeds to reflect on these in light of the Gospel.<sup>92</sup> Certain irregular forms of marriage – cohabitation, same-sex unions, and polygamy – are seen by the *Relatio* as part of the problem with regards to marriage. This is the view of the conservative wing of its drafters, who seemed to have carried the day. But can these irregular unions be part of the solution to the challenges facing the ideal family unions? I do not know.

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<sup>91</sup> In Canon law for marriage impotence is an impediment to marriage

<sup>92</sup> Editorial, “Married Couples are the Experts” *The Tablet* (25 October 2014), p. 2

Perhaps these views present a plea to refresh our models of family, as Bujo suggests. Is the traditional one-man one-wife model of family still viable? Is monogamy a sentence that Christianity has imposed on the whole of humanity? Is it not just an ideal? Is it not a relic of what marriage once was and has now run its course? The solutions proposed by the *Relatio* are remarkable and challenging, but they do not go ‘far enough’ in the views of one prominent participant at the synod, Vincent Cardinal Nichols<sup>93</sup> But this is a good start. As was said earlier, the *Relatio Synodi* attempts a balancing act. Does it succeed? In my view the success of the *Relatio Synodi* is that both camps, the liberals and conservatives, are not happy with the document – the former thinking that it does not go far enough and the latter viewing it as offering too many concessions.

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<sup>93</sup> Cited in Christopher Lamb, “Now the Work Really Begins”. “Married Couples are the Experts” *The Tablet* (25 October 2014), p. 4.

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## Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Promote Family and Marriage Ministry in Eastern Africa

By Joseph G. Healey, MM

### ABSTRACT:

The nine AMECEA<sup>94</sup> Countries participated in the III Extraordinary World Synod of Bishops on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization" in Rome from 5-19 October, 2014. In Eastern Africa Small Christian Communities (SCCs) were part of the consultation process and answered 11 of the 39 questions in the poll. Research on the 180,000 SCCs in Eastern Africa reveals that SCCs elect lay ministers/animators/coordinators for specific groups such as couples (married and engaged), youth and children and for specific pastoral ministries such as Catechesis, Justice and Peace, Religious Education, Sacraments and Spiritual/Religious Formation. A SCC is a communion of families. The SCC is an important support group for families and promotes a family culture. The SCC is both a place and a path for the pastoral care and evangelization of families and marriages. This praxis of SCCs in Africa is contributing to the development of the theology of the Church as Family of God.

SCCs in the AMECEA Region are preparing for the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the "The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary<sup>95</sup> World" to take place in Rome from 4-25 October, 2015. The meeting will "seek working guidelines in the pastoral care of the person and the family." We are challenged to continue to explore how SCC members and others can accompany families and couples who are wounded. This is the Ministry of

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<sup>94</sup> AMECEA is an acronym for "Association of Member Episcopal Conferences in Eastern Africa." It is a service organization for the National Episcopal Conferences of the nine English-speaking countries of Eastern Africa, namely Eritrea (1993), Ethiopia (1979), Kenya (1961), Malawi (1961), South Sudan (2011), Sudan (1973), Tanzania (1961), Uganda (1961) and Zambia (1961). The Republic of South Sudan became independent on 9 July, 2011, but the two Sudans remain part of one Episcopal Conference. Somalia (1995) and Djibouti (2002) are Affiliate Members. AMECEA is one of the eight Regional Episcopal Conferences of SECAM (Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar).

<sup>95</sup> The English word "contemporary" has a more up-to-date, "here and now" meaning than the word "modern." In Swahili see the difference between *kileo* and *kisasa*.



Compassionate Accompaniment. This is part of the imperative for all Catholics to go to the margins of society to serve the poor, migrants and those without hope. Pope Francis also emphasizes the importance of welcoming, listening to and accompanying young people today.

After the October, 2015 Synod of Bishops itself there will be an ongoing process involving collegiality and subsidiarity. There will be follow-up meetings and various commissions related to pastoral solutions to the challenges of family and marriage. Ongoing discussion and decision-making will take place on the local level through national episcopal conferences. Pope Francis is expected to issue a *Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation* with an ongoing plan of action that includes concrete pastoral solutions. SCCs help to promote this family and marriage ministry.

### **1. Introduction: Two World Synods of Bishops on Family and Marriage (2014-2015)**

The nine AMECEA Countries participated in the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on "The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization," in Rome from 5-19 October, 2014. This synod "defined" the "*status quaestionis*" (Latin for "the state of the question") of the topics of family and marriage.<sup>96</sup> Then the next synod – officially called the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the "The Vocation and Mission of the Family in

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<sup>96</sup> Appendix 22 lists 78 proverbs on this theme of "family and marriage." Six of these proverbs are used in the July to September, 2014 Poll on the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website (<http://www.afriprov.org>): "My favorite proverb of the month on "family and marriage" is..." The top voter getters are: The hoes of two people cultivating together in a field sometimes clash (hit) against each other. Sukuma (Tanzania) Proverb. Like ants, eat little and carry the rest back to your home. Bembe (DRC, Tanzania) Proverb. The 2016 African Proverbs Calendar has the theme "Family, Marriage and Relationships."

the Church and in the Contemporary<sup>97</sup> World"-- will take place in Rome from 4-25 October, 2015 and will "seek working guidelines in the pastoral care of the person and the family."

The total number of participants in the October, 2014 Extraordinary General Assembly was 253 made up of representatives from the five continents divided as follows: 114 presidents of Episcopal Conferences (including seven from the AMECEA Region), 13 heads of the "sui iuris" Eastern Catholic Churches, 25 heads of the dicasteries of the Roman Curia, 9 members of the Ordinary Council of the Secretariat, the secretary general, the under-secretary, 3 nominees from the Union of Superior Generals, and 26 pontifical nominees. Other participants included 8 fraternal delegates, 38 auditors, including 13 married couples, and 16 experts. There were 25 women. The participants included one married couple from the AMECEA Region: Dr. Jean Dieudonné Gatsinga and Emerthe Gatsinga Tumuhayimpundu who are responsible for young families in the Focolare Movement for Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya and Uganda and who live in Rwanda. The married couple from South Africa were Stephen and Sandra Conway, regional heads for Africa of Retrouvaille.<sup>98</sup>

Eight themes served as guidelines for the discussions at the Extraordinary Synod taken from the *Preparatory Document (Lineamenta)*. A bishop opened each session with an explanation of the theme (topic) of the day. Then a married couple gave their witness

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<sup>97</sup> The English word "contemporary" has a more up-to-date, "here and now" meaning than the word "modern." In Swahili see the difference between *kileo* and *kisasa*.

<sup>98</sup> A program to help couples to heal and renew their marriages. Thousands of couples who are heading for cold, unloving relationships or divorce have successfully overcome their marriage problems by attending the program. The Retrouvaille Program consists of a weekend experience combined with a series of 6-12 post-weekend sessions over three months. It provides the tools to help put one's marriage in order again and to rediscover a loving marriage relationship. The main emphasis of the program is on communication in marriage between husband and wife. It gives couples the opportunity to rediscover each other and examine their lives together in a new and positive way.

on the theme being discussed. The final synthesis called the *Final Report of the Synod (Relatio Synodi)* is being used as the *Lineamenta (Guidelines)* for the Ordinary Synod in October, 2015. These two meetings are closely connected to the Eighth World Meeting of Families on the theme “Love is Our Mission: The Family Fully Alive” to take place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA from 22-27 September, 2015.

This important meeting will involve all the People of God – bishops, priests, consecrated men and women, and lay faithful of the Particular Churches of the entire world – all of whom are actively participating in preparations for the meeting through practical suggestions and the crucial support of prayer. Such support [and input] on your part, dear families, is especially significant and more necessary than ever ... May we all, then, pray together so that through these events the Church will undertake a true journey of discernment and adopt the necessary pastoral means to help families face their present challenges with the light and strength that comes from the Gospel.<sup>99</sup>

The Vatican asked national bishops' conferences around the world to conduct a wide-ranging survey of Catholics asking for their opinions on church teachings on family,<sup>100</sup> marriage, annulments, single-parent families, adoptions, birth control, artificial contraception, abortion, surrogate motherhood (wombs for hire), premarital cohabitation, the culture of non-commitment and the presumption that the marriage bond can be

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<sup>99</sup> “Pope Francis Writes to Families Asking for Their Prayers Ahead of October Synod,” 26 February 2014, *Tablet Website*, retrieved on 1 March, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/texts-speeches-homilies/4/296/pope-francis-writes-to-families-asking-for-their-prayers-ahead-of-october-synod>

The importance of prayer is seen in the joint statement from the Episcopal Conference of Benin and of the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM/SCEAM), that concluded by inviting “all Christians, in the joy of the Gospel, to pray, to reflect and to act with the Church on the challenges of today's family,” *International Fides News Service*, 18 June, 2014, Email message dated 18 June, 2014.

<sup>100</sup> A request on our African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Facebook Page states: “Please contribute an African Proverb or Saying on ‘family’ and ‘marriage’ for our meeting on Saturday, 23 November, 2013. If possible mention the country and language.” There were 78 responses as of 24 June, 2014. A selection of these examples and others are listed in Appendix No. 22 in Joseph Healey, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*, that is available as a free Ebook on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website, retrieved on 16 July, 2014, [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build\\_new.pdf](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf)  
Some of these proverbs are classified into the three categories mentioned later in this chapter.

temporary, conditional marriages, common law marriage, mixed or inter-religious marriage, same-sex marriage/unions and divorce.

This survey included the Africa-related challenges especially connected to these 73 African family and marriages issues<sup>101</sup> (listed alphabetically):

- abandoned babies,
- abortion,
- abusive and violent husbands due to strong temperament, alcohol and drugs,
- AIDs orphans,
- alcohol and dependency,
- alcoholic family,
- artificial methods of family planning,
- child abuse,
- child-headed families,
- cohabitation (“come we stay”),
- communicating the faith to the next generation,
- couples living together before marriage to test female fertility,
- customary marriage,<sup>102</sup>
- displacement of people,
- divorce (including on the grounds of a woman being unable to have children and couples who subsequently remarry),
- domestic violence/violence in the family,
- dowry or bridewealth – sometimes understood as the purchase price of the woman,<sup>103</sup>
- drug abuse,
- dysfunctional family,
- early, child and forced marriage (including child mothers),
- Ebola orphans,

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<sup>101</sup> While many of these issues are universal, the African context and situation makes them African issues. There is some repetition because these issues are known by different names.

The importance of these 73 issues was confirmed by the grassroots reports of the delegates from Eastern Africa at the “AMECEA Pastoral Department Workshop for National Commissions for Marriage and Family Life Apostolate in the AMECEA Region” that took place in Nairobi from 23-27 June, 2014 and other meetings.

<sup>102</sup> In the African context this is sometimes called traditional marriage. This is a cultural marriage following the customs and traditions of the local African ethnic groups. “Traditional” has many meanings. Worldwide it can refer to the marriage union between a man and a woman.

<sup>103</sup> At the AMECEA Workshop in Nairobi in June, 2014 (see above) the many different traditions and practices of dowry or bridewealth among the nine Eastern African countries were compared and contrasted as well as the many different traditions and practices of dowry or bridewealth among the ethnic groups within a particular country. See examples in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

- economic injustice,
- economic migration (internal and external),
- economic pressures/financial pressures occasioned by work and certain cultural traditions,
- enslavement and frequent abandonment of women,
- ethnic animosity and tribal discrimination,
- domination of one marriage partner over the other,
- families with lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender members,
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM),<sup>104</sup>
- gender-based violence,
- gender inequality,
- generation gap (inter-generational conflicts between parents and children),
- globalization,
- hectic, fast and exhausting pace of work,
- HIV/AIDS including discordant couples,
- homosexual unions and gay marriage,
- human trafficking,
- ignorance,
- impact of poverty on family life,
- inequality between genders,
- infertility,
- infidelity of couples/sexual promiscuity,
- insecurity,
- interfaith marriage issues,
- lack of mutual trust and intimacy,
- levirate marriage (widow inheritance),
- material poverty,
- migration,
- misconception of human rights linked to reproductive health,
- mixed marriages (including inter-faith or interreligious marriages)
- need to travel greater distances to work,
- negative mass media and social media portrait of marriage,
- no boy/son,
- non-commitment of spouses,
- patriarchy in African society,
- philosophy of relativism,
- polygamy,<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Female genital mutilation (FGM), also known as “female genital cutting” and “female circumcision,” is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “all procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs for non-medical reasons.” Laurenti Magesa feels the word “mutilation” is unfortunate and emphasized by Western specialists from the outside. He comments that an African mother would never consider this cultural ceremony as a “mutilation” of her daughter. Conversation with the author in Nairobi, 19 June, 2014.

- poverty,
- property grabbing after death of spouse,
- reformulation of the very concept of family,
- refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs),
- rituals after death,
- same sex unions/homosexual unions and gay marriage,
- sexual dysfunctions,
- single parents (single mothers and single fathers),<sup>106</sup>
- street children and street youth,
- Sugar Daddies/Sugar Mommies,
- tensions with Muslims (related to interreligious dialog),
- terrorism,
- urbanization,
- use of contraceptives,
- violence,
- war,
- witchcraft and superstition,
- youth unemployment.

This survey was part of the 39 questions in the eight-page *Preparatory Document* (*Lineamenta*) to the synod that is also available online. It has been translated into Amharic, Bemba, Chewa, Ganda, Swahili, Tumbuka and other languages in Eastern Africa.

Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, secretary general of the Vatican's Synod of Bishops, asked the conferences to distribute the poll "immediately as widely as possible to deaneries and parishes so that input from local sources can be received."<sup>107</sup> This represents a significant shift in thinking in the Vatican. Bishop Marcello Semeraro of

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<sup>105</sup> During the AMECEA Workshop in June, 2014 (see above) Ethiopian layman Aman Desalegn posed this pastoral question: In Ethiopia there is a new Prefecture called Robe. More than 80% of the population are Muslim. Some Muslim men want to join the Catholic Church with their three or four wives. In the light of present Catholic teaching on marriage, what is the pastoral solution to accommodate these Muslim families?

<sup>106</sup> While we often refer to the reality of single mothers in Africa, the number of single fathers is increasing.

<sup>107</sup> Lorenzo Baldisseri in Joshua McElwee, "Vatican Asks for Parish-level Input on Synod Document," *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, 31 October, 2013, National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved 4 November, 2013, <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/vatican-asks-parish-level-input-synod-document>

Albano Diocese, Italy and secretary of the Council of Cardinals, “dismissed criticism of the decision to circulate a public questionnaire ahead of October's Synod of Bishops on the family. ‘The beauty of this moment is that the church feels encouraged to ask questions,’ he said. ‘The church doesn't just have answers; it also needs to ask questions.’”<sup>108</sup>

Another shift of thinking is in the process or method of the synod. Pope Francis has indicated that the synods will be more collegial and more participatory. This will promote affective and effective communion that is a constitutive part of the collegial government of Synod of Bishops. This means practicing “effective collegiality” by granting bishops participation in the central government of the Church. Hungarian Jesuit Canon Lawyer Father Ladislav Orsy, SJ stated: “It is reasonable to anticipate that soon, in October this year, we shall be watching a synod operating on a new pattern.”<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Marcello Semeraro quoted in John Allan, “‘Francis Revolution’ Rolls On in Both Symbols and Substance,” National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 30 January, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/francis-revolution-rolls-both-symbols-and-substance>

<sup>109</sup> Orsy writes further: “From our historical vantage point, we know that John Paul II and Benedict XVI chose (without saying it explicitly) to govern monarchically. Their policy consisted of calling on the bishops for advice, in the spirit of “affective collegiality”, but they never invited them to practice “effective collegiality” by granting them participation in the central government of the Church. Enter Francis. In his 1 April, 2014 letter, which is really an internal communication made public, he described bishops as his collaborators exercising effective collegiality with the Pope. As a foundational principle, he declared that he sees in the episcopal synod a manifestation of collegiality: “The synodal activity in virtue of episcopal order mirrors [represents] that affective and effective communion which constitutes the Synod of Bishops’ primary purpose... Then, Francis clarifies that he wants to promote affective and effective communion in obedience to Vatican II: ‘I wish to give full value [*desidero valorizzare*] to this precious heritage of the council.’” Ladislav Orsy, “Francis’ New Order,” *National Catholic Reporter (NCR)*, 19 June, 2014, and *Tablet*, 19 June, 2014, Tablet Website, retrieved 21 June, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/features/2/2624/francis-new-order>

[In an interview with the author at Georgetown University on 9 October, 2014, Orsy confirmed that](#) “affective collegiality” involves a consultative process by the world bishops while “effective collegiality” is involves a deliberative process (decision-making that includes voting to reach a consensus). Francis wants national bishops’ conferences to be more involved in the collegial process and ideally present a consensus view on a particular pastoral topic from the grassroots level. The Holy Spirit works through the consensus of these local bishops.

Orsy said that SCCs are operating as a canonical, juridical units. SCCs include both the territorial model (church in the neighborhood) and the specialized model (members with like interests such as Georgetown alumni in the Washington DC area forming SCCs). They have both canonical and spiritual

Part of this new pattern is for bishops, priests, brothers, and sisters to become more of a “Listening Church.” Traditionally bishops are officially part of the “Teaching Church.” But regarding the topics of family and marriage they need to become part of the “Listening Church.” – to listen to the lived experience of lay people, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, even youth and children. Nigerian theologian Father Elochukwu Uzukwu’s describes insightfully how church leaders need to become more of a “Listening Church.”<sup>110</sup> It can be rightly asked: How much do Catholic Church leaders in Africa know about (alphabetically): families that have sexual abusers, families with abusers of alcohol, forced marriages of young girls to older men, homosexuals (gays, lesbians); marriages with domestic abuse; marriages with sexual abuse; and economically poor single mothers?

In Eastern Africa Small Christian Communities (SCCs) were part of this consultation process especially through their parishes and national bishops’ conferences. SCC members in Eastern Africa contributed answers to the survey questions whose results were coordinated by the Pastoral Departments of the national bishops’ conferences in the AMECEA Region.<sup>111</sup> For example, the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) answered the 39 questions in a 25-page document. SCCs are mentioned seven times including these statements: “Strengthen Small Christian Community discussions on the family as a Domestic Church.” “The Catholic Church has provided

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dimensions. We agreed that the Catholic Church needs an African Avery Dulles to develop the Church as Family of God Model of Church.

<sup>110</sup> See *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*, Orbis Books, 1996, Wif & Stock Publishers, 2006.

<sup>111</sup> The AMECEA Pastoral Department synthesized the answers from the nine AMECEA countries for joint discussion and further planning at the AMECEA Plenary Assembly in Lilongwe, Malawi in July, 2014. One topic was “New evangelization as an opportunity to work towards true conversion and witnessing to Christian faith, with emphasis on the role of Family Life and Small Christian Communities.”



ministers, support groups and Small Christian Communities to support and journey with couples in crisis situations.” “Small Christian Communities should participate fully in family issues.”

SCC members also sent their answers and comments directly to the Synod of Bishops Office in Rome<sup>112</sup> and through other groups and organizations (like the Focolare Movement). Overall, however, this grassroots consultation was not widespread in Eastern Africa.

This process has been an opportunity to talk about the pastoral needs of people in real situations in Africa. It was hoped that the two synods will provide a realistic assessment of family life today and propose concrete pastoral approaches to meeting these challenges. A 19 November, 2013 “Editorial” in the *National Catholic Reporter* (NCR) states: “There is the danger that the media-rich West could dominate the discussion. Care will have to be taken to hear the voices of families in the Global South.” Voices of lay people “on the ground” in Africa can make an important contribution to the future of the family based on and in the light of the Gospel and African cultural values. Delegates from the AMECEA Countries can emphasize key “African” priorities and points in their “Interventions” at the World Synods of Bishops in Rome in October, 2014 and October, 2015. The voice and practical pastoral experience of the African Church is very important at these universal meetings.

Yet an example of how these Vatican documents are often written from a too

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<sup>112</sup> It is gratifying that our report “Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Promote Family Ministry/Family Life Apostolate in Eastern Africa” was received by the Synod of Bishops Office in the Vatican with this answer: “Thank you for your e-mail and the attached file which we have printed out and delivered to those who are analyzing and summarizing the responses and observations to the questions in the Preparatory Document. Please convey our appreciation for the work, effort and concern involved!”

Western perspective is pointed out by Laurenti Magesa:

The *Lineamenta* tries to list some of the striking features of the present situation, including – to mention only those most immediately urgent in the African churches – premarital cohabitation, single-parent families, polygamy,<sup>113</sup> and dowry or bridewealth. To say, as the *Lineamenta* does, that these are situations that “were unheard of until a few years ago” does not reflect the African reality. Polygamy and bridewealth as social institutions in Africa predate by far Christian evangelization, and all indications show that they are not about to disappear.<sup>114</sup>

He adds:

Implied here, it seems, is the recognition that ‘family’ is experienced differently in different places, to which experiences the Gospel should be applied. Hence the need for Local Churches around the world to bring concrete ”proposals” from their own situations to this dialogical table of the universal church, confident that – as She has always consistently done – the Holy Spirit will show us the way through whatever human muddle we may be in at the moment...

Without popular involvement [of the African Churches] in the process, the “pastoral policies” arising out of it will remain simply another in the long list of those impractical Catholic curiosities as far as the life of the people is concerned.<sup>115</sup>

To use the words of Pope Francis may the African delegates at the two synods be “bold and creative.”

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<sup>113</sup> Laurenti Magesa presents some interesting and challenging pastoral questions and solutions on polygamy in “Reflections on Marriage in Africa,” Nairobi: Unpublished paper 2014.

<sup>114</sup> Laurenti Magesa, “The Synod on the Family and Africa,” Catholic Theological Ethics in the World Church (CTEWC) Website, retrieved on 6 June, 2014, <http://www.catholicethics.com/forum-submissions/the-synod-on-the-family-and-africa>

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

## 2. Analyzing the Reality of Family and Marriage in Eastern Africa Today

Before answering the questions it is helpful to use Step One “See” of the Pastoral Spiral to analyze the local reality of family and marriage in Eastern Africa today.<sup>116</sup>

“Family and Faith” was the theme of Week Two in the Kenyan Lenten Campaign 2014 booklet *How Can We Be One?...for the Sanctification and Salvation of All People*. In the “Preface” to the booklet Archbishop Zacchaeus Okoth, Chairman of Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, states:

This year Pope Francis has called a special synod on the family. He wants the synod to examine the pastoral challenges experienced by families. The topic for Week 2 is “Family and Faith.” The institution of the family is continuously being challenged. In Kenya we have seen proposed laws touching on family and marriages presented in parliament that do not take into account both the African and Christian values. In our discussions we must look for ways we can fight this monster that has come to destroy the family. We need to have a unity of purpose for us to address this challenge.”<sup>117</sup>

Using the “See,” “Judge”<sup>118</sup> and “Act” method/process, the Situational Analysis Section identifies 10 challenges to the family in Kenya today:

The family today is faced with many challenges that threaten to tear it apart. They include an anti-Christian culture, divorce, busyness, absent parent figure, indiscipline, financial pressures,<sup>119</sup> lack of

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<sup>116</sup> The Editorial in the 20 September, 2014 *Tablet* states: “Accepting marriage as it is means accepting people as they are, warts and all – and their relationships as they are, stressed, broken, or harmonious and calm.” “Frowns Do Not Defend Marriage,” The Tablet Website, retrieved on 19 September, 2014 <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/downloadpdf/200914issue.pdf> The phrase “warts and all” means “The whole including all blemishes, faults, and shortcomings -- not concealing the less attractive parts.” This phrase is said to derive from Oliver Cromwell (Lord Protector of England in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century)’s instructions to the painter Sir. Peter Lely, when commissioning his portrait.

<sup>117</sup> Zacchaeus Okoth, Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *How Can We Be One?...for the Sanctification and Salvation of All People*, Kenya Lenten Campaign, 2014, Nairobi: KCCB Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, 2014, p. 7.

<sup>118</sup> Calling the second step “discerning” or “interpreting” or “analysing” or “evaluating” is preferred by some because the English word “judge” is associated with the word “judgement” and “judgemental.”

<sup>119</sup> One concrete example is the seemingly endless challenge and nagging concern of paying school fees especially in primary and secondary school. This affects many African families across the board.

communication, negative media influences, balance of work and family and materialism.<sup>120</sup>

The AMECEA Pastoral Department based in Nairobi, Kenya in November, 2013 also identified 10 challenges or problems under the heading: “Reality of the Problem Being Addressed:

Many families in the AMECEA Region, and indeed around the world face a lot of challenges such as: separation, divorce, cohabitation, polygamy, poor parenting, economic problems, impact of education systems, the distortion of the meaning of marriage, gender violence and other abuses that negatively affect the family.<sup>121</sup>

This research is part of its *Strategic Plan for 2013-2016* that focuses on “The Christian Family Life Campaign for the Protection of the Dignity and Value of Marriage and Family Life.”

Cieslikiewicz assesses the Tanzanian situation this way:

Above all the big question emerges: how are we to promote a powerfully supportive Christian community-culture of God’s family against family dissolution and despite the pressures of the media and of a hedonistic society? Not only are family values attacked, but also the phenomenon of single mothers, divorces and free unions threaten the institution of the family. In this way life in communion and its expressions are threatened more and more by individualism and materialism.<sup>122</sup>

All this local reality is within the context of (alphabetically) growing consumerism, globalization, materialism, relativism, secularism/secularization and urbanization throughout Africa.

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<sup>120</sup> Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *How Can We Be One?* p. 19.

<sup>121</sup> See AMECEA Pastoral Department, “Training and Capacity Building for the Coordinators of National Commissions for Marriage and Family Life in the AMECEA Countries.” Nairobi: Privately Published, 2013.

<sup>122</sup> Christopher Cieslikiewicz, “Urban Small Christian Communities,” p. 92.

Pope Francis challenges us to look at and respond to the present family reality. In Africa countries where most people “can identify at once with Jesus who was poor and marginalized,” the pope said, Catholics provide loving service to “God’s most vulnerable sons and daughters: widows, single mothers, the divorced, children at risk and especially the several million AIDS orphans, many of whom head households in rural areas.”<sup>123</sup>

A recent 2013 study in Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish in Karen, Nairobi, Kenya identified the following 12 factors that contribute to the lack of marital commitment: sexual dissatisfaction; violence to children and spouse; absence of love; conflict in roles; family interference; childlessness in marriage; infidelity in marriage; failure to cooperate with each other; personality conflict; problem of mixed marriage; couples from different cultural backgrounds; and challenges of the extended family.<sup>124</sup>

Mrs. Rose Musimba, Kenyan lay woman, the former Chairperson of the Parish Pastoral Council of Holy Trinity Parish, Buruburu I, Nairobi and a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team, affirms many of these challenges and factors in the following comments on the changes in Kenya society:

There is a lack of commitment to a permanent marriage. If a couple feel their marriage is not working, they just split up. There is more emphasis on conditional marriages. If certain conditions don’t work out, the two people separate and go their own way. Even with plenty of marriage counseling, many couples don’t focus on the basis issues and easily give up in their marriages. If we remove God from marriage we are done. Without Christian values we are finished.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Francis, “**Violence against Women Harms Society, Pope Tells African Bishops**,” *Catholic Information Service for Africa (CISA) Email News Bulletin*. Issue No. 35, Tuesday, 29 September, 2014. and on the CISA Website, <http://cisaneWSafrica.com/vatican-violence-against-women-harms-society-pope-tells-african-bishops>

<sup>124</sup> Solomon Gbaki, *The Pastoral Challenge of Marital Commitment: A Case Study of Our Lady Queen of Heaven Parish in Karen, Nairobi*, Nairobi: Unpublished Long Essay at Don Bosco Utume Salesian Theological College, 2014.

<sup>125</sup> Rose Musimba, cellphone interview with the author, 29 January, 2014.

Simon Rurinjah, Kenyan layman, evangelist and a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team, who died in 2015 pointed out:

Some of the challenges in Kenya threaten to tear up our Catholic families such as divorce caused by financial pressures. If a married woman is earning more than her husband there is often no compromise and the marriage is often in danger and it is hard to maintain peace and unity. The wife is often the first to go to the court and file for a divorce. There is little chance to educate the children. Couples stop praying to God who joined them together. Where there is no justice and peace how can we expect this family to be a Domestic Church Family of God.<sup>126</sup>

Tanzanian Sister Rita Ishengoma, STH, a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team based in Bukoba, Tanzania, says that one of the challenges of SCCs in Tanzania is involving men in the SCC Meetings:

A family without a father is “wounded.” So is a SCC without the presence of men. Men are not against SCCs, but they need to be approached. They will be interested to come when our meetings are timely and serious. Men are like that everywhere.<sup>127</sup>

Premarital cohabitation without marriage is increasing worldwide. In Kenya it is described as a *come we stay* (a popular Kenyan saying) arrangement when a man and a woman begin living together. It is especially an urban phenomenon. During a mass wedding of 34 couples at Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Kiambu, Nairobi, Kenya in December, 2013 the *National Mirror* reports that “Cardinal John Njue reached out to couples who have not solemnized their unions and are living in *come we stay* arrangements, urging them to take the bold step and embrace the sacrament of marriage.”<sup>128</sup> He challenged

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<sup>126</sup> Simon Rurinjah, conversation with the author, 29 January, 2014.

<sup>127</sup> Rita Ishengoma, “Three Challenges of SCCs in Tanzania,” Bukoba: Unpublished Report, 1 page.

<sup>128</sup> Kamau Gitau, “A Long Walk Down the Aisle,” *National Mirror*, 01:14 (January/February, 2014), p. 18.

parents saying that the dowry should not be a stumbling block for financial reasons, but ought to cement the bonds of love and family. Njue said that dowry cannot be greater than God.

In a related example Cardinal Njue visited Christ the King Church, Kangemi, Nairobi on 30 March, 2014. He said that this is the “Year of the Family and Marriage” and challenged Catholic parents of demanding too much dowry. There are parents who are willing to arrange the marriage of their children but are unable because the father of the groom does not enough dowry for his son. Other parents deny the wedding in the church unless the full customary dowry is paid.

Njue gave an example of a father who arranged for a man to marry his daughter in the Catholic Church. The customary dowry was paid in the Kikuyu tradition. The wedding was announced and the groom asked Cardinal Njue to join them during their wedding and the cardinal agreed. With one week remaining before the wedding in the church the parents of the bride requested 200,000 Kenyan shillings (approximately \$2,225) more from the groom. He failed to raise the money and so the church wedding had to stop. The cardinal sent for the father of the bride to discuss this new demand. But the father of the bride said to the parish priest to allow the wedding to continue since he didn’t want to have to face the cardinal. Cardinal Njue informed the parents that marriage is a sacrament and not something for parents to get rich.<sup>129</sup>

There is a similar situation to *come we stay* in Uganda. *Kasefuliya* is the Ganda word for “small cooking pot.” It is used to symbolize the domestic arrangement of a

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<sup>129</sup> Reported by Simon Rurinjah.

couple living together before they get married in the Catholic Church. The Ganda noun for the state of marriage is *bufumbo* from the verb *kufumba* that means “to cook.”

Openness to the possibility of communion for divorced and remarried Catholics is a complex issue. In preparation for the October, 2014 World Synod of Bishops this was the most talked about topic in Europe especially in Germany. It is less discussed in Africa. Univision (February, 2014) conducted a scientific poll of more than 12,000 Catholics in 12 countries representing Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America and North America. The results represent an interesting snapshot of current opinion within the body of the Catholic Church. There was a question: Do you agree or disagree with Catholic Church policy on divorce that says “An individual who has divorced and remarried outside of the Catholic Church, is living in sin which prevents them from receiving Communion”? The results were as follows:

**Europe** (France, Italy, Poland and Spain)

Agree: 19%

Disagree: 75%

No answer: 6%

**Africa** (Democratic Republic of the Congo – DRC and Uganda)

Agree: 75%

Disagree: 19%

No answer: 6%<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup>Univision Global Survey of Roman Catholics, Bendixen and Amandi International Website, retrieved on 9 March, 2014, <http://bendixenandamandi.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/ExecutiveSummary.pdf>



On the results of the poll Italian Cardinal Carlo Caffarra, the Archbishop of Bologna, Italy, observes:

75% of most countries in Africa are against allowing the divorced and remarried to receive communion. And so I ask again: which expectations are we talking about? Those of Africa or Europe? Does the Western world have the monopoly on what the Church should preach? Are we still stuck in that paradigm or have we started to listen, even just a little bit, to the poor? I am left perplexed when it is said we must go in a certain direction or there is no point in having the synod. Which direction? The direction desired by middle Europe? Well, why not the direction desired by the African community?<sup>131</sup>

During a SCCs Workshop in Lusaka, Zambia in December, 2013 Mulenga said that he is very compassionate and empathetic with couples he knows in Zambia who had a bad first marriage, got remarried and have been living together in a happy, stable marriage for 20 years or so – and are faithful Catholics who regularly participate in Sunday Mass. He said the Zambian Bishops are open to finding ways to help these people to be able to receive communion.<sup>132</sup>

In talking informally with various pastoral agents in Eastern Africa I hear suggestions that the Catholic Church should not be rigid, but flexible in dealing with these pastoral problems. Marriage cases should be looked at on a one-by-one basis. Some comments: Young African Catholic girls can be forced into even sacrament marriages due to family, cultural and dowry pressures – often marrying men much older than them. An example was given of a couple in a valid sacramental marriage who had four children. The husband left his wife and children. The wife remained a practicing Catholic and raised faithfully raised her children in the Catholic Church. She wanted a father for her

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<sup>131</sup> “Cardinal Caffarra Expresses Serious Concerns about Family Synod Debates,” *“ZENIT: The World Seen from Rome,”* email message dated 24 March, 2014.

<sup>132</sup> Clement Mulenga in a conversation with the author in Lusaka, Zambia on 4 December, 2013.

children so remarried “outside” of the Catholic Church and now has a long time, stable marriage. How can she be helped to receive the sacraments again?

Financial/economic pressures are a challenge that is constantly discussed and prayed about in our SCCs in Eastern Africa. A particular problem is “school fees.” SCCs members, especially in poorer areas, are constantly looking for money to pay the fees and needs of their children in primary schools and high schools. Another issue is the effect of two working (and salaried) parents on the quality of family life. With fulltime jobs they are spending less and less time at home. The education of their children suffers.

A situational analysis in Eastern Africa identified various abuses in the family as an important concern. The AMECEA Report at the Continental SCCs Workshop in Karen in September, 2012 under the theme “Ways to Implement Reconciliation, Justice and Peace” stated that we need to look at the concrete situations of life in the light of the Gospel (e.g. good governance, democratic space, child abuse and child protection). SCC members have opportunities to participate in awareness building and training workshops. The Spec Training and Consultancy Centre (STCC) in Nairobi is conducting workshops on Child Protection Policies in Nairobi in 2014.

To summarize this overall analysis, here is part of the Chairman of AMECEA Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel’s intervention at the synod on “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family, External Pressures on the Family” (*Instrumentum Laboris* Nos. 70 – 75) at the October, 2014 World Synod of Bishops itself: The pastoral challenges that face the Catholic families in Africa are (author’s **bold**):

1. **Poverty:** material poverty forces husbands or wives to migrate within countries or go to neighboring countries or abroad, especially in the Arab world.

This creates cracks in the marriage bond.

2. **Migration** is also linked to trafficking and also dispersion of children, who most of the time spill over to become street children and prone to be trafficked and abused.

3. **HIV/AIDS:**<sup>133</sup> a disease which creates division in the family and frequently divorce. Usually, both parents are affected and, sometimes both die, leaving children under the care of grandparents.<sup>134</sup> **NOTE:**

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<sup>133</sup> This very important challenge/problem for Africa has a surprising history. Given its very serious effect on marriage, family and relationships in general, it has received very little attention. It is significant that HIV/AIDS was not specifically mentioned in the 39 questions of the original questionnaire. Some African countries such as Kenya did not mention HIV/AIDS in its answer to the last question: "What other challenges or proposals do you consider urgent of useful to treat?" The coordinator of the compilation of answers in Kenya said that this was an oversight due to the pressure of limited time. Author's interview with Kenyan lay woman Theresa Abuya, Nairobi, Kenya, 25 June 2014.

HIV/AIDS was not mentioned in the *Final Report of the Synod*, another indication of the Western influence on the synod discussions and documentation. Cameroonian African theologian Father Jacquineau Azetsop, SJ says "HIV was totally absent. The synod was totally dominated by issues from the first world. It is unfortunate that African bishops forgot about it also." Email to the author dated 1 December, 2014. Commentators in North America and Europe are merely saying that the HIV/AIDS problem is being handled by medicine (that is, the "cocktail" of anti-retroviral drugs). This is fueled by news reports in the West such as: HIV is evolving to become less deadly and less infectious, according to a major scientific study. The team at the University of Oxford shows the virus is being "watered down" as it adapts to our immune systems. It said it was taking longer for HIV infection to cause AIDS and that the changes in the virus may help efforts to contain the pandemic. Some virologists suggest the virus may eventually become "almost harmless" as it continues to evolve.

James Gallagher, "HIV evolving 'into milder form,'" BBC News Website, 1 December 2014, retrieved on 2 December, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-30254697>

<sup>134</sup> Chairman of AMECEA Cardinal Berhaneyesus D. Souraphie's intervention began: "I speak on behalf of the Association of Member Episcopal Conferences of Eastern Africa (AMECEA) whose chairman I have been elected by my brother bishops in our Plenary in Malawi in July, 2014. AMECEA is a regional association which is comprised of eleven countries in Eastern Africa and the Horn of Africa, together with Djibouti and Somalia as affiliated members..." The full text of his presentation is published in AMECEA Online Newsletter, No. 70 (14 November, 2014), AMECEA Website, retrieved 14 November, 2014, [http://amecea.blogspot.com/2014/11/ethiopia-extract-of-chairman-of-amecea.html?utm\\_source=AMECEA+Newsletter&utm\\_campaign=5720a96ca8-](http://amecea.blogspot.com/2014/11/ethiopia-extract-of-chairman-of-amecea.html?utm_source=AMECEA+Newsletter&utm_campaign=5720a96ca8-)

“71% of the 35 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the world live in sub-Saharan Africa. The call by (UNAIDS) to close the gap around access to HIV services will not be met unless the delivery of antiretroviral treatment (ARV) is radically reshaped into community-led approaches that adapt to the realities of those living with HIV.”<sup>135</sup>

It is very important to understand that these three challenges are interconnected and interrelated and part of Africa’s overall social, cultural, economic and political context and reality.

Souraphiel balances these problem areas by saying (author’s **bold**):

In order to strengthen Catholic families in the region, the positive elements of **traditional African family values** ( e.g. respect for life, love of children, respect of mothers, right influence of the extended family, respect for elders, etc.) need to be taught in schools, in parishes, and in institutions... In spite of the many challenges and difficulties of married life, there is also **joy and happiness in Catholic families**. There are saints in family life: grandparents, parents, children, and even unborn children.<sup>136</sup>

### **3. Answers to the First Four Questions in the Questionnaire/Survey of the *Lineamenta* of the 2014 Synod of Bishops**

The first four questions in the questionnaire/survey treated the teaching of the Catholic Church’s post-conciliar magisterium on the family and marriage under the title “The Diffusion of the Teachings on the Family in Sacred Scripture and the Church’s Magisterium.” This is a deductive approach, from the top down. An inductive approach, starting with the reality of family and marriage in the world today, would have been more

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[AMECEA Online Newsletter 6 5 2013&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_term=0\\_85fa866553-5720a96ca8-6746297](http://www.amecea.org/online-newsletter/6-5-2013/medium=email&utm_term=0_85fa866553-5720a96ca8-6746297)

<sup>135</sup> “Flexibility in Health Systems and Community Approach that Adapts to the Daily Realities of HIV-positive People,” Fides News, 29 November, 2014

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

creative and helpful. The word “diffusion” is one of those Latin-English words that is hard for the ordinary Catholic to understand similar to “dissemination” or “propagation.” Better expressions would be “communication” or “transmission.”

Concerning the Catholic Church’s teaching, in his apostolic exhortation *The Joy of the Gospel*, Pope Francis offers pastors of the Catholic Church guidance on how to interpret traditional teaching concerning marriage and family life. One principle is that “the Church has rules or precepts which may have been quite effective in their time, but no longer have the same usefulness for directing and shaping people’s lives” (No. 43). Another was that “the Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak” (No. 47). These words are particularly relevant to two of the most contentious issues raised in present consultation on marriage and family life: contraception and the admission of divorced and remarried Catholics to Holy Communion.

The Local Churches in African can make a special contribution to these questions. AMECEA emphasizes developing SCCs as a concrete expression and realization of the Church as Family Model of Church that reflects the ecclesiology of communion of Vatican II. The 1994 First African Synod developed the specific ecclesial identity of the Church as Family of God in Africa while the 2009 Second African Synod focused more on the pastoral and mission activities of this Church as Family of God in Africa, namely to work toward reconciliation, justice and peace.

St. John Paul II’s 1995 Apostolic Exhortation *The Church in Africa* Number 63, under “The Church as God's Family” states: “It is earnestly to be hoped that theologians in Africa will work out the theology of the Church as Family with all the riches contained

in this concept, showing its complementarity with other images of the Church." In this Church as Family of God Model of Church, along with parish-based SCCs and lectionary-based SCCs, we can talk of family-based SCCs. In Eastern Africa a SCC is a communion of families. SCCs made up of families are Africa's strength. SCCs are part of the "Communion of Communities Model of Church."

As African theologians explore more deeply the "Church as Family of God Model of Church," we see the growing importance of the "Small Christian Community Model of Church" that is closely related to the "Communion of Communities Model of Church" and the "Communitarian Model of Church." The Communitarian /Participatory /Collaborative/ Circular/Inductive/Bottom-up Model can be compared and contrasted to the Hierarchical/Institutional/Pyramid/Deductive/Top-down Model.<sup>137</sup>

How is the recent praxis of SCCs in Africa contributing to the development of the theology of the Church as Family of God? African cultural relationships and communal life are the foundations that provides a developing model of a church based on the African family. Small Christian Communities are affirmed as the fundamental building blocks of the Church as Family of God in Africa. Stated another way, SCCs are the ideal foundational units of building the Church as Family of God.

In the *Final Message of the Bishops of Africa to the People of God* of the First African Synod, Section 28 on "The Church as Family and Small Christian Communities" the bishops state: "The Church, the Family of God, implies the creation of small communities at the human level, living or basic ecclesial communities... These individual

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<sup>137</sup> See the section "Small Christian Communities: Ecclesiologies and Models of Church" in Kieran Flynn, *Communities for the Kingdom: A Handbook for Small Christian Community Leaders*, Eldoret: AMECEA Gaba Publications, *Spearhead* Nos. 181-182, 2007, pp. 67-81.

Churches as Families have the task of working to transform society.” Democratic Republic of the Congo theologian Father Bénézet Bujo emphasizes that “the bishops of the African Synod declared that the Church in Africa should make the family model their own and Small Christian Communities have stressed this concept of family.”<sup>138</sup> Irish missionary and theologian Father Kieran Flynn, SPS asserts: “It is in being transforming communities [of themselves and others] that SCCs realize their ecclesial identity in the Church as Family Model.”<sup>139</sup>

We continue to explore in depth how the praxis and theology of SCCs are an integral part of a relevant and credible African ecclesiology based on the Church as Family of God. This is within the context of the AMECEA priority of developing a theological framework of addressing key issues and challenges of “New Evangelization in Solidarity in the AMECEA Countries.”

#### **4. SCCs’ Involvement in Family and Marriage Ministry and Evangelization**

First it is important to understand the African context for marriage, family and raising children. Traditionally marriage in Africa is not just between a man and a woman, but between two families and even two clans. The children belong to the community and not just to the biological parents. Bujo asserts:

For African marriage is not a private affair but embraces the extended families<sup>140</sup> of both husband and wife, the living dead and the yet unborn. The Western model of marriage that distinguishes between the civil and

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<sup>138</sup> Bujo, Bénézet, *Plea for Change of Models of Marriage*, Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2009, p. 14.

<sup>139</sup> Flynn, *Communities*, p. 99.

<sup>140</sup> Tanzanian theologian Father Laurenti Magesa and other African theologians and scholars emphasize that “extended family” originates from a Western sociological conception of family structures. For Africans this wide network of aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, etc. is simply “family” or on a wider scale “clan.” Many have pointed out that this wide family network is the Africans’ worst enemy as well as best friend. This family solidarity system (called “the economy of affection”) can help needy members, but the more financially successful members can be constantly preyed upon by their “poor cousins.”

the religious has little meaning. Marriage is always religious... There is no marriage without both God and the ancestors.<sup>141</sup>

Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins help in raising the children. Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel states: “As Pope Francis is pointing out to the world, if it listens, to defend the family, especially the Christian Family based on fathers and mothers including the grandparents.” We have some interesting Case Studies of the specific importance of the grandparents in passing on the Catholic Faith to their grandchildren. The SCCs and the *Mahber* can be important support groups in which this takes place. This is so well expressed in the picturesque Sukuma, Tanzania proverb *One knee does not bring up a child*.

This important role of the wider community is seen in the many “African Proverbs and Sayings Related to Small Christian Communities (SCCs)” listed in Appendix 22 on pages 555-558 of the Ebook *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* by Joseph Healey. The African value of community is expressed in the conviction of the fundamental African proverb *I am because we are; we are because I am*.<sup>142</sup> This has important implications for SCC Members. They accompany the betrothed couple on each stage of their whole marriage journey. Among the Sukuma people in Tanzania sometimes the priest blesses the handing over of the cows (the dowry) from the father of the bridegroom to the father of the bride in a religious ceremony followed by a festive meal. SCC members participate

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<sup>141</sup> Bujo, Bénézet, *Plea for Change of Models of Marriage*, p. 17.

<sup>142</sup> See Chapter III on “Marriage and Family Life” in *African Cultural Domains Book 2: Cycle of Family and Interpersonal Relationships*, edited by Michael Kirwen, Nairobi: MIAS Books, 2010.



and give support. Yet some of these values are changing in contemporary Africa especially through urbanization and secularism/secularization.

The Fourth Arua, Uganda Diocesan Synod 2005 described the close link between families and SCCs:

We will be empowering the Christians and Christian Communities. This means that all stakeholders intensify their activities right from the families, Small Christian Communities, Chapels, Parish, Diocesan departments and institutions. Much has to be done to the families and SCCs so that they became a center for the spiritual and material development of the Christians. Therefore the role of parents and SCCs should be reinforced in order to change the negative attitudes of the people.

SCCs are involved in family ministry/family life apostolate/family evangelization<sup>143</sup> that includes marriage ministry,<sup>144</sup> youth ministry, and a variety of other pastoral ministries and spiritual ministries. Research on the 180,000 SCCs in Eastern Africa reveals two approaches that work together. Family ministry is carried out in the SCCs that have an ecclesial identity in themselves. Parish-based SCCs elect lay ministers/animators/ coordinators for:

1. Specific groups: Couples (married and engaged), Youth and Children.
2. Specific pastoral ministries: Catechesis, Justice and Peace, Religious Education, Sacraments and Spiritual/Religious Formation.

SCC members also actively participate in family ministry and marriage ministry on the outstation, subparish and parish levels.

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<sup>143</sup> These three expressions are used interchangeably.

<sup>144</sup> Marriage ministry is inclusive of marriage counseling that can be very “problem-centered” (couples having marital difficulties) and encouraging/advising/helping young couples to get married in a sacramental marriage.

The series of six questions in the questionnaire on “The Pastoral Care of the Family in Evangelization” is particularly relevant to SCCs in Eastern Africa. One question asks: “What pastoral care has the Church provided in supporting couples in formation and couples in crisis situations?”

A beautiful Case Study of pastoral care and inculturation is “Celebrating the Sacrament of Marriage at the Small Christian Community (SCC) Level in Malawi” by Malawian Montfort priest Samuel Satiele, SMM. He vividly describes a wedding mass that took place at the home of the bride (matrilineal society) in a SCC in Namitembo Parish, Zomba Diocese, Malawi with this evaluation:

This practice restores the communitarian aspect of the African family which is vital. By registering the marriage at that SCC, involving counselors of that SCC, announcing marriage bands at that SCC and celebrating the sacrament itself at that SCC, the local community is involved. There is greater participation of relatives and this makes them feel part and parcel of the process.<sup>145</sup>

By celebrating marriages in the homes of SCC members many more people in the neighborhood participate. This includes friends and neighbors who are not Catholics and Muslims. SCCs have a special way of being inclusive that could not happen at the parish church.

SCCs in Eastern Africa choose one of its lay members (usually a married person) to be responsible for marriage ministry. This leader both advises young people to sacramentalize their marriages in church and counsels couples who are having marital difficulties. Musimba points out:

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<sup>145</sup> The full Case Study is available on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at: <http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/africa/malawi/55-malawi.html>

The SCC members more easily notice problems among couples. One or two women in the SCC should take the wife apart privately. One or two men in the SCC should take the husband apart privately. Then the SCC members should talk with the couple together to encourage dialog among them. Prayer is important throughout.<sup>146</sup>

Segment Two of the video *The Church in the Neighborhood: Small Christian Communities* portrays “Services (Ministries) in the SCC” with a focus on the SCCs in St. Joseph the Worker Parish in Nairobi Archdiocese. One very important and necessary service/ministry is “Marriage Animator/Marriage Counselor.” The video points out that “more than half of our Catholic married people have never received the sacrament of marriage” and thus cannot receive the sacrament of the Eucharist. Solutions are discussed in the SCC regarding problems such as high dowry payments, drunkenness, financial irresponsibility and opposition to mixed marriages.<sup>147</sup>

Statistics in Nairobi Archdiocese show as many as 60% of Catholic couples have not sacramentalized their marriages (had their marriages blessed in church). Thus they cannot receive communion.<sup>148</sup> “The traditional reasons of the high dowry payment and high cost of the wedding itself (including the reception) remain, but other new reasons have strongly emerged. First, young Catholics are reluctant to make permanent, lifetime commitments.<sup>149</sup> They prefer living together for a period of time to “test” their relationship. This is related to the *come we stay* arrangement when a man and a woman

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<sup>146</sup> Musimba, *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> Taken from *The Church in the Neighborhood: Small Christian Communities* (with Swahili and Arabic versions). Nairobi: Ukweli Video Productions, 1995. Segment I: “Life and Activities of SCCs.” Segment II: “Services (Ministries) in the SCC.”

<sup>148</sup> I personally experienced this reality. In Nairobi on 19 April, 2015 I celebrated a Sunday Mass for 101 people. 43 received communion.

<sup>149</sup> For an increasing number of couples worldwide “until love do us apart” has replaced “until death do us apart.” In other words the lifetime commitment in all situations has been replaced by we can split/separate/divorce if problems arise and mutual love wanes and even disappears.

begin living together before formalizing their marriage. Second, as Kenyan diocesan priest Father Deogratias Kibirango points out having so many broken marriages makes young people fear this institution.<sup>150</sup> Third, married women increasingly leave their husbands if he loses his job or cannot provide financial security to the family. One Kenyan Sister told me that we need nothing less than “an aggressive campaign to help couples to sacramentalize their marriages.”<sup>151</sup>

For various reasons a number of Catholic women want children, but not a husband and a permanent, lifetime marriage. More equality in the government marriage laws is raising new tensions and questions.

There are different patterns in Eastern Africa. While traveling in Malawi in December, 2013, I was pleasantly surprised that many people receive communion at the Sunday masses and major feasts. I was told that many young people are getting married in the Catholic Church today.

During a SCCs Class at Tangaza in February, 2014 we had an animated discussion on Catholic marriages in Africa. One seminarian raised a provocative question: “Why do candidates for the priesthood spend eight to 10 years in formation and studies before ordination to the priesthood (a sacrament in the Catholic Church and a **permanent, lifetime commitment**) while couples preparing for marriage (also a sacrament in the Catholic Church and a **permanent, lifetime commitment**) can have as few as three marriage instructions before their wedding in church?” Another asked: “How come? Why is there such a big difference?” A random sample of marriage instructions in Nairobi Archdiocese ranged from a Crash Course of two weeks to three two hour

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<sup>150</sup> See Henry Onyango and Stephen Mukhongi, “Tackling Pastoral Challenges Facing the Family,” *Seed*, Vol. 26, Nos. 8/9, p. 10.

<sup>151</sup> Sister Esther Ichugu, conversation with the author, Nairobi, Kenya, 14 April, 2014.

sessions with the priest to five sessions spread over one and a half months to a six month marriage preparation program. Clearly more needs to be done in depth in preparing couples for Catholic Marriage. Better marriage catechesis should be a high priority.

Ethiopia and Eritrea have a traditional devotional small community or association called *Mahber*. It is a devotional group with a long history and significance. It offers important social support in the Ethiopian family system.

Some of the activities of *Mahberat* (plural) in Ethiopia are:

- The small community reconciles members who have disputes through special ceremonies. When every member does not drink from the ceremonial pot (cup), the leaders immediately know something is wrong and try to reconcile the disputing parties. Once reconciled, both parties drink together.
- Helping at marriages, anniversaries and funerals. This includes encouraging young people in the association to get married in the Catholic Church, providing the choir at different events and organizing and serving at the related social events.

Thus a serious, ongoing challenge for SCCs is to help many of their members to regularize their marriages in a Catholic ceremony. One increasingly hears the expression “Eucharistic Famine” referring to the many, many Catholics in Africa who cannot receive communion because they are not officially married in the Catholic Church. Botswana Bishop Boniface Tshosa emphasizes that this situation causes much pain in an African context:

Many [people], because of what we call irregular marriage situations cannot receive the Eucharist -- the Food of Life. In Botswana, food is a

symbol of welcome, of togetherness, of sharing, of celebration, of solidarity. To exclude someone from the Eucharist in Botswana, is interpreted as being excluded from God's company and God's love. Words expressing otherwise do not convince.<sup>152</sup>

Some SCCs have a campaign to help their members to overcome some of the main stumbling blocks such as finalizing the dowry and raising money for the expenses of the marriage celebration.<sup>153</sup> Our research has gathered case studies of marriages that take place in the home of SCC members and are less expensive than in a Catholic Parish Church. SCCs help couples in arranging Multiple or Group Wedding Ceremonies (many marriages celebrated together at the same time or *ndoa za kwa pamoja* in Swahili) in their outstations and parishes to cut down on the overall expenses.

One SCC member pointed out that we Small Christian Communities adult members are supposed to show a good example to others. It is very embarrassing if our children ask for church weddings before their parents get married in church. Nigerian Salesian seminarian Chiemeka Maria Utazi, SDB confirms this in his analysis on “Good Parenthood: “If youth don’t see their fathers or parents in SCC, they say, why should we go? If their parents are not married in the church, they ask questions on the need of SCCs?”<sup>154</sup>

Sometimes the SCC sends a small committee to mediate a marriage dispute. A Swahili video segment called *Jumuiya ya Upatanisho – Gekano, Kisii* [Kenya] (“SCC of

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<sup>152</sup> Boniface Tshosa, intervention at the 1994 First African Synod, “Fifth General Congregation,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, 17, 1338 (27 April, 1994), p. 11.

<sup>153</sup> Servant of God Cardinal Maurice Michael Otunga liked to give the example of the SCC in Nairobi Archdiocese that donated the bride’s wedding dress to a couple in its small community who had insufficient money for all their needs for their Marriage Ceremony in the Catholic Church.

<sup>154</sup> Chiemeka Maria Utazi, “Absence of Youth and Men in Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in Eastern Africa,” p. 4, SCCs Website, retrieved on 7 December, 2014, [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/absence\\_men\\_youth.pdf](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/absence_men_youth.pdf)

Reconciliation– Gekano, Kisii [Kenya]”) has a short play<sup>155</sup> about a husband and wife who have a dispute over money. A delegation from the SCC composed of two men and two women visit the couple in their home. They discuss the problem, pray together and resolve the dispute. Then the couple witnesses to their reconciliation in the whole small community. This example of a delegation of SCC members is similar to the designated committee of small community members (*Mahber* and SCCs) used in Ethiopia for marriage counseling.

The SCCs in Moshi Diocese, Tanzania, have a special charism for mediating family disputes especially tensions and disagreements between husband and wife. Sometimes this is done by the whole local small community. Other times the Marriage Counselor – a specific pastoral ministry in the SCCs – helps in the reconciliation. As a result of this SCC outreach, many broken and strained marriages have been healed and other conflicts resolved. Following the traditional Chagga Ethnic Group customs, the SCC members use special cultural symbols of reconciliation such as the green *isale* leaf, the *isale* tree (a special reconciliation tree), a white goat and even a baby.

Recent research<sup>156</sup> in Nairobi shows that SCCs are actively involved mediating marriage disputes. Issues include that the husband is drinking alcohol too much, in-laws are interfering in the marriage and the effect on raising the children in the Catholic faith when one of the spouses joins a Pentecostal Church. Intervention by a small mixed delegation of men and women from the SCC has

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<sup>155</sup> This should be used as a teaching video. A segment is shown and then discussed in small groups.

<sup>156</sup> Examples are documented in the SCCs Course Papers and answers to the essay exam questions at Tangaza University College and Don Bosco Utume Salesian Theological College in March, April and May, 2014.

been often successful. More complicated marriage problems are referred to a trained marriage counselor.

On how SCCs can reconcile married couples with problems Rurinjah states: “The couple should remember their vows that they took during their wedding in the church before God and Christians.” He adds: “The married couple should live as people who forgive each other in order to maintain peace in the family. Remember the Gikuyu, Kenya proverb *A home is for a husband and a wife.*”

“Reflection on Adoptive Parent Families” is a catechism lesson in *The Journey of Faith – 5: Together in Jesus’ Family* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2012). It is based on *Matthew* 18:5 and 25:40; *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC) Nos. 2379, 1654; and *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (CSDC), No. 218. It tells the touching story of Stephen and Caroline, a childless African couple in a Small Christian Community who adopt the three little children of a young couple who lost their lives in a terrible road accident. The lesson also helps SCCs in the ongoing formation of couples and the deeper understanding of family and marriage.<sup>157</sup>

Regarding how Christian families transmit the faith in Kenya we started SCCs of the Pontifical Missionary Childhood (PMC). Small groups of children meet on Saturdays or Sundays in their parishes to pray and to reflect on the *Bible*. In Kitale Diocese 15 PMC children belong to St. Francisca SCC in Holy Trinity Parish and 30 PMC children belong to St. Ann SCC in St. Peter Claver Parish. Similar SCCs of PMC children are in Chaani

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<sup>157</sup>The full reflection is Appendix 16 in the Ebook -- Joseph Healey, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa* -- on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at: [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build\\_new.pdf](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf)



Parish in Mombasa Archdiocese. The PMC SCCs use the Lumko "Seven Steps" Method of *Bible Sharing/Gospel Sharing*. The PMC animators are trained first in this method.

Kenyan Salesian seminarian Isaiah Muthukumi, SDB adds:

When men and women especially husbands and wives attend SCC meetings together it unites them more and they are able to plan and bring up their family together. This will help them instill the spirit of prayer and responsibility in their children, mirroring the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. Small deeds such as being with the family and praying together are very important.<sup>158</sup>

## **5. Other Challenges and Proposals in the Questionnaire/Survey of the *Lineamenta* of the 2014 Synod of Bishops**

The final question in the survey/questionnaire on family and marriage – “What other challenges or proposals related to the topics in the above questions<sup>159</sup> do you consider urgent and useful to treat?” -- was open-ended and offers wide scope to present the Eastern Africa perspectives and grassroots experiences.

Pope Francis says: “I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities.” One intriguing proposal in Africa for many years is to develop an inculturated Rite for the Catechumenate of Christian Marriage (Marriage Catechumenate) similar to the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA or the Adult Catechumenate). This could be two years or more depending on the customs and traditions (cultural dimension) of the local ethnic groups in Africa. It would integrate the

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<sup>158</sup> Isaiah Muthukumi, “Reflection on the Lack of Men and Youth in SCCs,” Nairobi: Unpublished Paper, 2014, p. 4.

<sup>159</sup> It is surprising that HIV/AIDS was not mentioned in the questionnaire. Organizers in Rome said that the questionnaire could not cover all the local challenges and topics and it was the responsibility of National Bishops Conferences, etc. to add their own priorities in answering the last question. It is more surprising, and even disturbing, that some of the answers to the questionnaire from Africa do not mention the topic.

basic elements of consent in the traditional African marriage rituals into the Christian sacrament of marriage.

This would follow the stages of marriage<sup>160</sup> in an African context (also called “marriage in stages”) where marriage is a process rather than a single event and marriage is between two families rather than just between two individuals. The Catholic sacramental and spiritual “moments” (not “moment”) would take place during different stages of the marriage process: from the first official meeting and agreement of the two families of the couple to the betrothal (engagement) to the living together to paying of the dowry or bridewealth (that often takes place slowly over many years)<sup>161</sup> to the wife’s pregnancy to the birth of the first child<sup>162</sup> to the civil marriage to the Catholic Marriage Rite (that could be in a Catholic Church or in a SCC) to the wedding celebration.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> In an interview with the author in Washington DC on 9 October, 2014 Orsy mentioned that in the history of the Catholic Church the German tribes had a “gradual” approach to the sacrament of marriage. It was confirmed after the couple lived together successfully for six months.

<sup>161</sup> This important ritual is not well understood by Westerners. In some African ethnic groups the dowry or bridewealth payment lasts a lifetime. The groom is required to pay a major portion of it before being allowed to marry the bride. The balance is paid in portions throughout the couple’s lifetime to ensure that there is a continued relationship between the two families.

<sup>162</sup> Here is an interesting parallel: “New Catholics who enter the church at the Easter Vigil continue to meet with their group of sponsors and teachers for months after their initiation through a process called *mystagogia*. They are reminded that the parish community still supports them and that the Easter Vigil was not a graduation ceremony from a program, but the start of something new. In a recent email, my friend Isaac posed a question: What might a mystagogical approach to marriage prep look like? Could parishes invite mentor couples to check in on newlyweds at the three-month, six-month, one-year mark? Could parishes gather groups of couples for faith sharing, community service activities, and social events, with babysitting provided as necessary? Surely, many parishes are already doing these and other things to support married couples. But it would be so valuable for the synod to encourage church leaders to facilitate opportunities for newly married adults beyond traditional marriage and baptism preparation.” Mike Jordon Laskey, “Three Things I’d Tell the Synod on the Family About Marriage,” National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 16 October, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/young-voices/three-things-id-tell-synod-family-about-marriage>

<sup>163</sup> I asked a devout Catholic married woman in Iramba Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania what was the happiest day of her life. She answered: “Not the day of my marriage or the day of the birth of my first child. It was the day my first born son was circumcised.” For her this symbolized that her son had passed to manhood and the continuance of the family lineage was assured. As a mother she had successfully done her part.

The couple usually live together during most of this process -- what is commonly called premarital cohabitation.<sup>164</sup> During this period, sometimes called the “trial marriage” or “the test of compatibility” period, the couple test their ability to live together and to get along with their in-laws such as the wife getting along with her mother-in-law if it is a patrilineal society. In African ethnic groups it is essential for the couple to have successful genital intercourse and for the wife to be fertile. If she is barren (as well as not having children) the marriage can break up. More recently if the wife does not get pregnant the man can also be tested because there are various reasons for male infertility (male's inability to cause pregnancy in a fertile female).

Overall this proposal is based on the principle that the structure of the Catholic Marriage Rite is flexible enough and general enough to integrate cultural differences in the process of African inculturation.

This is also being discussed in other parts of the world. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn of Austria stated: “Cohabitation could be seen as a stage on the way to marriage.”<sup>165</sup>

One challenge is how SCCs can reach out to families and married people on the margins and periphery of society. This includes pastoral, missionary and social outreach to (alphabetically): abandoned babies, abused children, families and marriages affected

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<sup>164</sup> This applies the principle of gradualism to the question of marriage. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn states: "When discussing marriage and the family, we must first of all ask ourselves why couples all over the world often cohabit nowadays without marrying. Before I evaluate this morally, I have to learn to understand why even committed Catholic couples nowadays often only gradually discover the way to the Sacrament of Marriage." He said that recognizing that cohabiting couples may be on the way to the sacrament of marriage did not mean agreeing with cohabitation as a whole. Christa Pongratz-Lippitt, “Schönborn: The Next Synod Must Concentrate on the Realities of Family Life,” *Herder Korrespondenz*, December, 2014, NCR Website, retrieved on 10 December, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/news/global/sch-nborn-next-synod-must-concentrate-realities-family-life#.VIdIZvVMc4k.facebook>

<sup>165</sup> Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, *The Tablet*, Vol. 268, No. 9069, 4 October, 2014, p. 1.

by HIV/AIDs including AIDs orphans, homeless families, migrant families, single parents and their children and young people from broken homes. Segeja states:

“SCCs are thus tasked with the responsibility to provide the needs of these vulnerable people. Perhaps this is the most challenging pastoral concern of SCCs especially today when we observe the difficult and intolerable treatment to which so many children in Africa are subjected.”<sup>166</sup>

SCC members have a special opportunity to minister to families and couples affected by HIV/AIDs. One concrete example is outreach to the millions of AIDs orphans in Africa. Then there is the challenge of marriage counseling to discordant couples. In a SCC how does the Marriage Counselor advise a husband or wife whose spouse has AIDs? How does unaffected partner avoid getting affected himself/herself? Should they use a condom? How does the SCC Marriage Counselor advise a faithful Catholic woman who discovers that her husband is sleeping with other women? Should she and her husband first both get an AIDs test? Should she deny marital privileges to her husband until he is promises to be faithful only to her?

These are real questions that are very complicated, sensitive and nuanced. At a certain point the SCC Marriage Counselor may have to refer the questions to a specially trained Marriage Counselor. Some of the issues to be considered: The primacy of personal conscience informed by the teachings of the church. The use of condoms in special situations. Importance of prayer for deeper discernment. Advice on a case by case basis.

SCC members also have a special opportunity to minister to families and couples in the refugee camps and internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Eastern Africa.

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<sup>166</sup> Nicholas Segeja, “Small Christian Communities: A Vital Icon,” p, 27.

This compassion and care for the poorest and neediest mentioned above is a special concern of Pope Francis.

Various bishops and other Catholic Church leaders in Eastern Africa are offering pastoral solutions to these challenges of family and marriage.

## **6. African Proverbs and Sayings Related to Family and Marriage**

Another approach to this final question in the *Lineamenta* is to reflect on African proverbs and sayings related to family and marriage. Pastoral and theological insights emerge. They are used in many SCCs' contexts and situations. A full list is found in Appendix No. 22 of the Ebook -- Joseph Healey, *Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*.<sup>167</sup> Some examples by three categories:

### **African proverbs and sayings on family life (17)**

*Home is best.* (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

*Blood is thicker than water* (many African languages).

*You can only resemble the parents that gave birth to you. For a cow does not give birth to a sheep* (Yoruba, Nigeria).

*You only have one mother* (many African languages).

*A mother is the cornerstone of a family* (Somali, Somalia).

*A child does not laugh at the ugliness of its mother* (Uganda)

*The person who has not traveled widely thinks his or her mother is the only cook (the best cook)* (many African languages).

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<sup>167</sup> On the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at: [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build\\_new.pdf](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/Build_new.pdf)

*No matter how skinny, the son always belongs to his father*<sup>168</sup> (Galla, Ethiopia)

*No matter how useless a person may seem to another, they mean the world to their family*  
(Zulu, South Africa).

*Brothers and sisters are like calabashes; even if they knock each other, they don't break*  
(Bunyoro, Uganda).

*Brotherhood and sisterhood does not mean physical resemblance but mutual assistance*  
(Africa).

*Eating together strengthen brotherhood and sisterhood* (Tongo, Ghana).

*When a man person walks naked it is the kinspeople who feel the shame not the naked*  
*person.* (Igbo, Nigeria).

*When brothers fight to death, the stranger inherits their father's estate* (Igbo, Nigeria).

*You must treat the earth well. It was not given to you by your parents. It is loaned to you*  
*by your children* (Gikuyu, Kenya).

*A visitor is a guest for two days. On the third day give him or her a hoe.* (Swahili, Eastern  
and Central Africa).

*Let the guest come so that the host may benefit (get well).* (Swahili, Eastern and Central  
Africa).

These proverbs and sayings are closely linked to African values of relationships, community and unity. They touch all aspects of human life.

*Blood is thicker than water* is a very common African proverb found in many languages. We have to appreciate the deep African cultural values, ties and loyalties of family, clan and ethnic group. In his intervention during the First African Synod in 1994

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<sup>168</sup> There is a Sukuma, Tanzania riddle about the importance of the father in the home under the theme "Respect for Those in Authority." The riddle says: "*You do not wipe your nose on the pillar that supports the whole house?*" The answer is: "*Parental father.*"

on the tragic civil war in Rwanda Nigerian Bishop Albert Obiefuna of Awka, Nigeria explained that "when it comes to the crunch, it is not the Christian concept of the church as a family that prevails but rather the adage that *blood is thicker than water.*"<sup>169</sup> Thus the blood of family and ethnic group in Africa is thicker than the water of *Baptism*. Stated another way, at the core of an African's priorities and allegiances blood relationship is often more important than the church as a family, even for an African who has become a Christian. This helps to explain how horrible genocide and ethnic cleansing can take place in predominantly Christian countries such as Rwanda and Burundi and more recently in South Sudan.

The Marsabit Diocese,<sup>170</sup> Kenya Website states:

**Ethnicity:** Our region, for the last couple of years, has been deeply divided on ethnic lines to a point that sessions at deanery level, where different ethnic groups are present, have become a real problem. People identify themselves more with their tribe than with their faith. There is a tedious but obligatory journey of helping the people gain the sense of belonging to a larger Christian Family. It is urgent for the Church to find ways and means of bringing the people together.

In developing African Christianity and the integration of African values and Christian values in the family we are challenged to go further and rephrase this traditional African proverb to say *the water of Baptism is thicker than the blood of tribalism*. This can start at the grassroots level in our homes and SCCs. For the church to see itself as a Christian family is to extend the boundaries beyond the clan and ethnic group. The water of *Baptism* must be stronger than the blood of narrow clannishness and tribalism. In this process SCCs are challenged to become genuine agents of change for the transformation

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<sup>169</sup> Albert Obiefuna, "Fourth General Congregation," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 17, 1338 (April 27, 1994), p. 9.

<sup>170</sup> Retrieved on 8 June, 2014, <http://marsabitdiocese.org/parishes.html>

of society. The African theology and praxis of Church-as-Family can be one of the keys to reconciliation, peace, and unity on the continent.

**African proverbs and sayings on raising children (12)**

*The hen with baby chicks doesn't swallow the worm* (Sukuma, Tanzania).

*A cow never runs away from her calves.* (Bemba, Zambia).

*When the woman is hungry she says, "Roast something for the children so they might eat"* (Akan, Ghana).

*Your own child is like an axe; once it falls on you, you pick it up.* It means no matter how serious the offence that your child has committed, you cannot abandon the child or for the child to cease to be your child (Bemba, Zambia).

*A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother puts into its palm* (Yoruba, Nigeria).

*Who loves the mother must love the children also* (Bemba, Zambia).

*A child who is not taught by its mother will be taught by the world* (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

*The person who does not listen to an elder's advice gets his or her leg broken.* (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

*A stick is straightened while still young* (many African languages).

*It takes a whole village to raise a child* (Igbo and Yoruba, Nigeria Proverb).

*You are the child of a duck; take care of yourself* (Sukuma, Tanzania).

*If you think education is costly, try ignorance* (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).



African proverbs and sayings teach many values about raising children. Often the mother has the central role. Traditionally the elders' advice was very important, but this is changing especially in urban Africa.

There are many insights in the Igbo and Yoruba, Nigeria proverb *It takes a whole village to raise a child*.<sup>171</sup> Child upbringing is a communal effort. The responsibility for raising a child is shared with the larger family (sometimes called the extended family). Everyone in the family participates especially the older children, aunts and uncles, grandparents, and even cousins. It is not unusual for African children to stay for long periods with their grandparents or aunts or uncles. Even the wider community gets involved such as neighbors and friends. Children are considered a blessing from God for the whole community. This communal responsibility<sup>172</sup> in raising children is also seen in the Sukuma (Tanzania) proverb *One knee does not bring up a child* and in the Swahili (East and Central Africa) proverb *One hand does not nurse a child*.

This African proverb can be effectively used during infant baptism. It is the whole extended family that has the responsibility of raising the child in the Catholic faith especially the parents and godparents but also the other siblings, aunts and uncles, grandparents and the whole SCC at times. This includes the spirit and practice of pastoral accompaniment.

In general this Nigerian proverb conveys the African worldview that emphasizes the values of family relationships, parenting, parental care, self-sacrificing concern for others, sharing and even hospitality. This is very close to the Biblical worldview as seen

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<sup>171</sup> A full explanation can be found on the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved on 16 May, 2014, <http://afriprov.org/index.php/african-proverb-of-the-month/23-1998proverbs/137-november-1998-proverb.html>

<sup>172</sup> The plan of religious education in the USA uses the term "whole community catechesis."

in scripture texts related to unity and cooperation (*Ecclesiastes* 4:9,12) and a mother's self-sacrificing love (*Isaiah* 49:15-16).

American politician Hillary Clinton is not the only person who has made this Nigerian proverb popular. In a "Church for Schools" day to support Catholic education in St. Peter's Square, Vatican City on 10 May, 2014 Pope Francis emphasized that family, school and Catholic community go hand in hand and said: "This makes me think of an African proverb which says: *It takes a village to raise a child*. Let us all say it together: *It takes a village to raise a child*. All together: *It takes a village to raise a child*." Inviting the audience or congregation to repeat the proverb is a very African style of communications.

A commentator stated:

Now surely the Pope was meaning to underscore the need for Catholic community in assisting parents to raise children. And that truth needs reinforcing today more than ever. As many growing families in cities in the Western world have found, raising morally healthy children in a secular anti-Christian culture is very challenging. Finding and maintaining a Christian community is essential for good friendships for children, for reinforcing faith and morals, and for giving parents the peers and encouragement they need to continue to go against the tide in raising their children to know, love, and serve God.<sup>173</sup>

Thus in the pope's interpretation of this proverb the village and other local communities supports the parents. The SCC is one of the places where this can happen. The SCC is the church in the neighborhood and closely connected to the local network of clans and families. SCC members are agents of pastoral life, catechetical instructions and evangelization in promoting family life, parenting

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<sup>173</sup> John-Henry Westen, "It Takes a Village to Raise a Child': Did Pope Francis quote Hillary Clinton?" LifeSiteNews Website, retrieved on 14 May 2014, <http://www.lifesitenews.com/blog/it-takes-a-village-to-raise-a-child-did-pope-francis-quote-hilary-clinton>

and family values. Another interpretation of this proverb that the church does not agree with is that the parents and families' help in raising children is insignificant and that more authority should be given to the government and other outside institutions.

**African proverbs and sayings on marriage ministry/marriage preparation/marriage counseling (14)**

*Marriage is like a peanut/groundnut; you have to crack it to see what is inside* (Akan, Ghana).

*Marriage is like a book; every page/day is a new lesson* (Ewe, Ghana).

*Marriage is the main post of the hut.*<sup>174</sup>

*My beloved* (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

*The journey of marriage is far, far* (Ashante, Ghana).

*No matter how beautiful is your sister, you cannot marry her* (Bemba, Zambia).

*The house that is built well (like a fixed faith) doesn't move any longer* (Lwalu, Democratic Republic of the Congo – DRC).

*A single person cannot counsel a married couple* (Luo, Kenya and Tanzania)

*An uncircumcised person can never advise a circumcised person (concerning adulthood including marriage)* (Gikuyu, Kenya).

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<sup>174</sup> "'Marriage,' says an African proverb, is the main post of the hut.' If the house, that is, the Church of Christ in Africa, should sway, perhaps that is because its main support does not plunge deep enough into the earth of Africa. There is a great number of Catholics excluded from the sacraments, the source of unity and strength, by reason of their irregular marital situation. Still others are barred from coming into the Church by reason of already existing relationships. It is good that all of these problems should be treated so as to find out what pastoral solutions are possible." No. 68 of *Instrumentum Laboris* for the Synod of Bishops First Special Assembly for Africa, *The Church in Africa and Her Evangelizing Mission Towards the Year 2000: "You Shall Be My Witnesses" (Acts 1:8)*, Vatican: Liberia Editrice and Nairobi Paulines Publications Africa, 1993.

*The hoes of two people cultivating together in a field sometimes clash (hit) against each other* (Sukuma, Tanzania).

*Hoes that dig together never miss to knock at one another* (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

*Two calabashes in a basin of water will by all means touch each other but not break each other.* (Ewe, Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria).

*Until the nagging wife marries the second husband, she will not know the value of the first one* (Igbo, Nigeria).

*The electric wires are still live* (a warning not to play with the "live wires" of AIDS because they are packed with enough "voltage" to kill). (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

*Better a still curtain than a flag blowing in the wind* (Swahili, Eastern and Central Africa).

Marriage is basic to African society, but there are many different traditions and customs depending on the local context and situation.

Concerning the Sukuma proverb above – *The hoes of two people cultivating together in a field sometimes clash (hit) against each other*:<sup>175</sup> The Sukuma Ethnic Group is the largest ethnic group (more than six million people) in Tanzania and lives mainly in rural areas in the northwestern part of the country on or near the southern shores of Lake Victoria – mainly in the Mwanza and Shinyanga Regions. The Sukuma are agricultural-pastoralists whose lives focus on farming (maize, sorghum, cassava,

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<sup>175</sup> A full explanation can be found on the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved on 16 May, 2014, <http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-proverb-of-the-month/57-2014-african-proverb-of-the-month/664-february-2014-the-hoes-of-two-people-cultivating-together-in-a-field-sometimes-clash-hit-against-each-other-sukuma-tanzania-proverb.html>

sweet potatoes, cotton, etc.) and herding cows. The hoes of two people weeding together in their fields sometimes clash (hit) against each other as seen in this Sukuma proverb.

This proverb is applied to married people living in close proximity. They experience misunderstandings and differences at times. This is part of daily life. The proverb is used during Wedding Masses to encourage the newly married couple to persevere in bad times and difficult situations. When marital problems occur, it is used in marriage counseling.

Concerning the Lwalu proverb above -- *The house that is built well (like a fixed faith) doesn't move any longer*. The African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website states:

This is a proverb used in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in the daily life of married people that praises them for not having the spirit of divorce. The faith union of the Catholic couple is sacramentalized and there is no question of divorce. When a couple marries, the man and woman should live together and try always to feel happy. When a person builds his or house solidly it should remain forever. Before the construction of a house, the cost estimate should be evaluated so that the person has sufficient money to finish. This is true in marriage where commitment is the foundation that makes the husband and wife want to persevere together until they die. The demolition of a house is connected to its expansion or improvement and not to its total destruction. Faith finishes building a house. It is fixed to continue into its old age. This imitates the marriage contract. Aging in marriage with his or her partner is desirable for the family. Building a permanent home is desirable for the family.

In this Lwalu proverb we learn to respect marriage as a permanent alliance.

For example, when we say that something is permanent or mandatory, we say that it is “set in stone” such as referring to the Ten Commandments tablets prescribed

by God originally. Marriage is a foundational sacrament so the marriage is “set in stone.” And this stone supports the home.<sup>176</sup>

## 7. Small Christian Communities in the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the 2014 Synod of Bishops

The *Instrumentum Laboris* (Latin for “Working Document”)<sup>177</sup> for the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization” was published in the Vatican on 26 June, 2014. The working document notes that many responses were “submitted by the synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris* (Latin phrase which literally means “of one’s own right”), the episcopal conferences, the departments of the Roman Curia and the Union of Superiors General. In addition, other responses — categorized as *observations* — were sent directly to the General Secretariat by a significant number of dioceses, parishes, movements, groups,<sup>178</sup> ecclesial associations and families, not to mention academic institutions, specialists, both Catholic and non-Catholic, all interested in sharing their reflections.” Cardinal Baldisseri, Secretary of the Synod of Bishops

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<sup>176</sup> Laur Mwepu, “June, 2014 African Proverb of the Month,” African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 6 June, 2014, <http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-proverb-of-the-month/57-2014-african-proverb-of-the-month/682-june-2014-the-house-that-is-built-well-like-a-fixed-faith-doesnt-move-any-longer-lwalu-democratic-republic-of-the-congo-drc-proverb.html>

<sup>177</sup> There have different responses to this document. The **30 July, 2014** issue of *National Catholic Reporter* has an Editorial (“Obstacles Riddle Synod on the Family’s Path”) and two essays. The Editor’s note states: “The 50-page *Instrumentum Laboris*, or working document, that was released 26 June and will guide the discussion during the October Synod of Bishops on the family was dry and impersonal, lifeless almost, and that confounded us at NCR. *From personal experience and from listening to colleagues, readers and friends, we have experienced marriage and family life as life-giving and joyous. Marriage and family life is not without its challenges and struggles; it offers ample lessons in humility and forgiveness, but that, too, at the best of times can be nurturing. If the writers of the Instrumentum Laboris, which is now supposed to be being studied in dioceses throughout the world, had begun with the fundamental experience of people who have lived in marriages and raised families, we wondered, how different would it have been?*” See National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 31 July, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/news/vatican/editorial-obstacles-riddle-synod-familys-path>

<sup>178</sup> The wide variety of names used shows both the richness and complexity of the English language in describing the “small community” or “small group” phenomenon under which SCCs fit.

explained that intervening in the Extraordinary Synod will be 23 lay auditors, seven of whom will be married couples, one of whom will render its testimony during the Synodal sessions.

The document highlights both the pastoral challenges and concrete examples of pastoral care of the family and marriage. It has 26 references to “community” and 10 references to “communities” that are used in different senses: Christian community, church community, ecclesial community, faith community, local community, new community and parish community. Three pertinent sections are:

No. 48 under “The Family and Integral Development” states:

The responses mention the significance of the close collaboration of families/homes and the parish in the mission of evangelization, as well as the need for the active involvement of the family in parish life through support and solidarity on behalf of other families. In this regard, invaluable assistance comes from the community made up of families. Membership in movements and associations can also be a particularly significant source of support.

### **COMMENTARY**

While the expression “the community made up of families” is more general, this is an exact description of Eastern Africa SCCs that are called “a communion of families.” This is part of the “Communion of Communities Model of Church” that is explained at length in other parts of this Ebook. “Movements and associations” cover a wide variety of small communities and small groups. Some Catholics continue to place SCCs in these two categories although they are different theologically.

No. 54 under “Marriage Preparation” states: “Many laudable initiatives in marriage preparation are taking place in various parts of the world, including: “new

communities” which promote retreats; personal encounters; groups for prayer, reflection and discussion.”

### **COMMENTARY**

What is missing in the document and very important for the AMECEA Region is that Eastern African SCCs have a specific ministry for marriage and a specific minister for marriage preparation called the Marriage Animator or Marriage Counselor. This person is responsible for coordinating the marriage preparation of couples and counseling married couples in the SCC.

No. 146 under “The Response of the Particular Churches”<sup>179</sup> states:

When parents, usually after an absence from the church for some time, request from the ecclesial community the sacramental preparation of their children, the most recommended approach in all the responses is to readily accept them without making any distinctions. Receiving them with a basic attitude of respect, a friendly disposition and a willingness to listen to their human and spiritual needs creates a proper and beneficial atmosphere for communicating the Gospel message. The important and effective ecclesial experiences aimed at assisting parents along the way include: catechesis in the family and community; the ecclesial movements in support of the pastoral care of married couples; Sunday Masses; family visits; prayer groups; popular missions; the activities of Basic Christian Communities; groups of *Bible* study; the pastoral activities of ecclesial movements.

### **COMMENTARY**

While the questionnaire’s responses from around the world lump BCCs or SCCs together with a variety of pastoral options to help the sacramental preparation of children, the Eastern Africa experience of SCCs as a key pastoral priority and a new way of being church is significantly different. Unfortunately the *Instrumentum Laboris* doesn’t reflect

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<sup>179</sup> No. 58 under “Support for Familial Spirituality” uses diocese, Particular Church and Local Church interchangeably and states: “Clearly, Local Churches should be able to find that this richness is a real resource for not only promoting various initiatives on behalf of couples intending marriage but devising ways to provide suitable pastoral care for families today.



the basis insight of the Eastern Africa experience – that parish-based SCCs are a primary means and “place” for family catechesis, marriage catechesis, family life apostolate, religious education, pastoral care and evangelization.

At the same time the document emphasizes various pastoral activities and methods for marriage preparation and catechesis such as “older and more experienced couples act as “godparents” to younger couples who are preparing for marriage” (No. 56). In Eastern Africa often these pastoral activities and methods take place in the SCCs and are carried out by SCCs members.

The day after it was published this *Instrumentum Laboris* was presented during in the AMECEA Pastoral Department Workshop for National Commissions for Marriage and Family Life Apostolate in the AMECEA Region that took place in Nairobi in June, 2014. The theme of the workshop was “Marriage and Family Life” – a Preparation for the Synod of Bishops III Extraordinary General Assembly.”

The presentation on “How SCCs Are an Important Part of the Pastoral Care of the Family and Marriage in Evangelization in Eastern Africa” began with all the participants receiving a bookmark with the map of Eastern Africa that celebrates the 180,000 SCCs in the nine AMECEA countries.<sup>180</sup> The bookmark mentions the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website and “Facebook Page” ([www.smallchristiancommunities.org](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org)) that has an Ebook on “SCCs in Eastern Africa” and many online SCCs resources.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> During a discussion of the delegates from Kampala Archdiocese, Arua Diocese and Kiyinda-Mityana Diocese it was pointed out that the success of SCCs in Uganda is uneven. There is no “uniform” experience. Arua Diocese has the best overall SCC plan. The *Bible* is used in some youth groups and not in others.

<sup>181</sup> This includes online SCCs that appeal especially to youth. During a discussion on the importance of the *Bible* it was mentioned that young people use an electronic *Bible* on their smartphones rather than a paper *Bible*. A Zambian Sister said, “But the youth should still bring their *Bibles* to the SCC Meetings.” Another

We can be grateful for the special pastoral experience and activities of parish-based SCCs that are a key pastoral priority in the AMECEA Region. This is seen in the light of the People of God and Communion Ecclesiology that developed after Vatican Two and the African cultural priorities of communion, solidarity, relationships and family values. SCCs are a new way of being church from the bottom up/from the grassroots up. A SCC is a communion of families. An outstation is a communion of SCCs. A parish is a communion of outstations. And so on.

SCCs are the “place” of much pastoral care and the SCC members themselves are the “agents” of pastoral ministry and evangelization. Cardinal Polycarp Pengo of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania calls SCCs in Swahili *chombo mahususi cha uinjilishaji* that can be translated as “a special or privileged instrument or means of evangelization.” Related to our topic SCCs in Eastern Africa have two important lay ministries:

1. Religious Education/Catechesis Animator (for youth and children).
2. Marriage Animator or Marriage Counselor
  - a. Helping young couples sacramentalize their marriages.
  - a. Counseling couples with marital difficulties.

The two meanings of the Eucharist Famine in Africa were explained.

### **8. Small Christian Communities in the *Final Report and Message* of the 2014 Synod of Bishops**

The methodology of the Third Extraordinary Synod was the "See," "Judge" and "Act" process as follows:"

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person commented, “But they do – on their smartphones.” Electronic devices and the internet require a new way of thinking.

1. The interventions (written interventions submitted a head of time and oral interventions presented during the sessions) were organized around the eight (8) topics listed in the *Instrumentum Laboris*.
2. Each topic was introduced by an "auditor/auditrice" (mainly married couples) with focus on personal experiences,<sup>182</sup> then sharings by the bishops or any other delegates for not more than four minutes ("See" – by listening to the actual experiences of members of the Family of God especially married couples).
3. Then the bishops made their interventions<sup>183</sup> on the given topic after having listened to the life experiences ("Judge" – by reflecting on the Teachings of the Sacred Scripture and Magisterium with regard to the topic being discussed).
4. In small groups, the bishops discussed and proposed pastoral responses to the given topic ("Act" – by offering the pastoral guidelines in the light of the teachings of the Church and with consideration of the actual situation).

Many commentators have emphasized the fact that the bishops and cardinals publicly

disagreed with one another in their attempt to discern what is good for the church. The Catholic Church really has not had this experience since the open debates of the Second

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<sup>182</sup> These couples spoke of the deep joy they had experienced in their marriages and family lives – as well as the difficulties they had overcome and the struggles they had faced.

<sup>183</sup> During this meeting Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel presented his important intervention on behalf of AMECEA that is referred to above.

Vatican Council. The pope himself supported this open discussion. This is an on-going process of listening, discussion,<sup>184</sup> dialogue, debate, discernment and proposed pastoral responses leading up to the Synod of Bishops Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly to take place in Rome from 4-25 October, 2015. The pope likes to call this process a journey or a path -- in the spirit of the meaning of the word “synod.” “Synodality is the path of the Catholic Church.”<sup>185</sup> This process of synodality is a journeying together.<sup>186</sup> The Pope often refers to the model of synodality in the Orthodox Churches. He emphasizes, “The synod is not a parliament, it’s a protected ecclesial space. And this protection exists so (that) the Holy Spirit can work.”<sup>187</sup>

Pope Francis says that he is open to changing Catholic Church regulations and practices (NOT doctrine) for pastoral reasons, that is, finding a “pastoral solution.” He says if there is a consensus of the recommendations of bishops on the local level (for example, a national or regional episcopal conference) on a particular pastoral issue, change is possible in the context of a process of subsidiarity (decentralization) and collegiality.<sup>188</sup>

The two-week synod in the Vatican produced two major documents on 18 October, 2014 – the *Final Report of the Synod (Relatio Synodi) of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: "The Pastoral Challenges of*

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<sup>184</sup> See the creativity of St. Paul Inside the Walls Madison, New Jersey, USA)’s Young Adult Fireside Chat: Open discussion for young adults that welcomes opposing viewpoints on the great moral issues of our day.

<sup>185</sup> Francis, “Homily on 29 June, 2013,” America Website, retrieved on 2 February, 2015, <http://americamagazine.org/content/dispatches/pope-decides-pallium-will-be-given-metropolitan-archbishops-home-dioceses>

<sup>186</sup> There are many relevant metaphors. The Story of “The Road to Emmaus” in *Luke* 24. The famous African proverb: *If you want to walk fast walk alone. If you want to walk far walk together.*

<sup>187</sup> “Pope Francis Speaks Up on Synod Process – It Isn’t Over,” *Catholic News Agency* (CNA), 30 November, 2014, retrieved on 2 December, 2014, <http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-francis-speaks-up-on-synod-process-it-isnt-over-37950/>

<sup>188</sup> [In an interview with the author at Georgetown University on 9 October, 2014, Father Ladislaus Orsy, SJ confirmed that](#) “affective collegiality” involves a consultative process by the world bishops while “effective collegiality” is involves a deliberative process (decision-making that includes voting to reach a consensus). Francis wants national bishops’ conferences to be more involved in the collegial process and ideally present a consensus view on a particular pastoral topic from the grassroots level. The Holy Spirit works through the consensus of these local bishops.

*the Family in the Context of Evangelization" (5-19 October 2014)* and the *Message of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops* – and many supporting documents. These official documents highlight both the pastoral challenges and the concrete examples of pastoral care of the family and marriage.

There are many references to “community” and “communities” (or their equivalents marked in **bold**) in these October, 2014 synod documents that are used in different senses (alphabetically):

**church community(ies)**

**community(ies) of believing families**

**community(ies) of faith or faith community(ies)**

**community(ies) of the faithful**

**community(ies) who accompany couples and families and care for their wounds**

**ecclesial community(ies)**

**entire community:** “The complex social reality and the changes affecting the family today require a greater effort on the part of the whole Christian community in preparing those who are about to be married. The importance of the virtues needs to be included, among these chastity which is invaluable in the genuine growth of love between persons. In this regard, the synod fathers jointly insisted on the need to involve more extensively the entire community by favoring the witness of families themselves and including preparation for marriage in the course of Christian Initiation as well as emphasizing the connection between marriage and the other sacraments. Likewise, they felt that specific programs were needed in preparing couples for marriage, programs which create a true experience of participation in ecclesial life and thoroughly treat the various aspects of

family life (Number 39 – “Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage” -  
- in the *Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family*)

**PROPOSED ACTION:** Lengthen and deepen the pre-marital catechesis. Beginning and advanced training programs for married couple accompaniers (mentor couples) and other facilitators/ formators/presenters/ trainers. Emphasize Train the Trainers (TOT) Workshops for parishes, schools and marriage programs. Engaged couples SCCs are both a faith sharing group and a support group. Married couple accompaniers are called upon when needed. This overall approach would insure that the engaged couple not focus too much on the celebration and social aspects of their wedding only. One concrete suggestion:

Parishes could encourage couples to go to marriage preparation weekends before any formal preparation takes place in the parish. They can initiate small groups for the married to meet in their own homes and provide resources that will enable them to discuss how to deepen their relationship with their spouse and with God. These could include exercises, reflections and discussions on weekly Scripture readings for Sunday Mass. One such resource is *I Am With You*, a trilogy of books covering the three liturgical years.<sup>189</sup>

**Family is the core of parish communities:** “Family is thus an authentic domestic church that expands to become the family of families that is the ecclesial community” (*Message of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*)

**local church community(ies)**

**local community(ies)**

**new communities:** “The initial years of marriage are a vital and sensitive period during which couples become more aware of the challenges and meaning of married life.

Consequently, pastoral accompaniment needs to go beyond the actual celebration of the

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<sup>189</sup> Brian and Maureen Devine, “What Marriage is About,” *Tablet*, 6 December, 2014, retrieved on 6 December, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/parish-practice/6/4081/what-marriage-is-about>

Sacrament (*Familiaris Consortio*, Part III). In this regard, experienced couples are of great importance in any pastoral activity. The parish is the ideal place for these experienced couples to be of service to younger couples, with the possible cooperation of associations, ecclesial movements<sup>190</sup> and new communities.<sup>191</sup> Married couples need encouragement in a basic openness to the great gift of children. Emphasis on the importance of a familial spirituality and prayer life should lead couples to meet regularly to promote growth in their spiritual life and solidarity in the concrete demands of life. Meaningful liturgies, devotional practices and the Eucharist celebrated for entire families were mentioned as vital factors in fostering evangelization through the family” (Number 39 – “Accompanying the Married Couple in the Initial Years of Marriage” – in the *Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family*).

A key text is “with the possible cooperation of associations, ecclesial movements and new communities.” Parish-based SCCs are included here. There is a wide range of pastoral possibilities.

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<sup>190</sup> “Ecclesial movements” and “church movements” are used interchangeably.

<sup>191</sup> Another English translation is: “with the possible involvement of associations, church movement and new communities.” The official Italian text of this sentence is: “La parrocchia è considerata come il luogo dove coppie esperte possono essere messe a disposizione di quelle più giovani, con l’eventuale concorso di associazioni, movimenti ecclesiali e nuove comunità.”

In the AMECEA Region in general the Catholic Church see the various associations, ecclesial (church) movements and new communities connected to marriage such as Couples for Christ, Engaged Encounter, Faithful House (FTH) Program, Family Life Ministries, Holy Cross Family Ministry, Marriage Care, Marriage Encounter, Marriage Preparation (Marriage Prep), Pre-Cana, Pro-Life, Retrouvaille, SCCs, Teams of Our Lady, other Christian Family Movements and their various centers and institutes as an important assistance and a big help to the parish. The Catholic Church continue to offer a range of formation opportunities and approaches. There is not a single program/one size fits all approach.

While some priests might see these groups as “sheep stealers” (setting up separate exclusive groups of married couples outside the parish structure), most priests and pastoral agents welcome and depend on these specialized groups in marriage ministry within the parish structure. So the best translation of *concorso* has the contextual meaning of cooperation/collaboration/involvement/assistance/a running along with/with the help of.

**PROPOSED ACTION:** Lengthen and deepen the post-marital catechesis. Beginning and advanced training programs for married couple companions (mentor couples) and other facilitators/formators/presenters/trainers. Emphasize Train the Trainers (TOT) Workshops for parishes, schools and marriage programs. Newly married couples SCCs that are both a faith sharing group and a support group. Married couple companions are called upon when needed.<sup>192</sup>

### **parish as the family of families**

#### **small activist units**

**vibrant communities:** “Vibrant communities exist in parish composed of married couples or entire families who meet regularly, pray together, study and thoroughly discuss the *Catechism of the Church*, read the *Bible* and talk about everyday problems, difficulties and the beauty of life lived in common by couples and treat questions concerning the upbringing of their children. In other words, they strive to combine faith with life. They help each other in times of illness, unemployment or other problems. Many of them participate in the work of *Caritas*. Many help in the preparation of engaged couples for marriage in strengthening their relationship of friendship which is to endure long after their wedding. Groups of young Catholic mothers with young children also accommodate mothers without any religious affiliation or non-believers, thus creating a new form of mission. Families are forming various new communities which assist couples in crisis or help women in existential or psychological difficulty” (Number

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<sup>192</sup> *I Am With You* is a trilogy of books that reflect on the readings at mass for years A, B, and C. They are a new approach to Scripture for married people. They will help them to understand the key messages in the Sunday readings. They include witty illustrations and a prayer for the couple. Website: <http://www.twoinoneflesh.org.uk/> *Marriage Matters* is a Word.doc Book, a weekly 60 word snippet adapted from the reflections on the Sunday Mass Scripture readings in the *I Am With You* series.



2 – “The Gospel of the Family and Family Ministry” -- in the *Report Preceding the Discussion at the Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family*).

**PROPOSED ACTION:** Special outreach programs beginning with listening, accompanying, walking with before teaching (the Emmaus model).

**welcoming community(ies)**

### **COMMENTARY**

While the term “Small Christian Communities” is not mentioned specifically in these documents, their life and ministry is definitely described in the examples above. The synod has inspired SCC members and others to become more active in promoting Catholic family life and spirituality in Africa and everywhere. Some concrete examples:

- Experienced SCC couples should pastorally accompany engaged couples.
- Experienced SCC couples should pastorally accompany young married couples.<sup>193</sup>

SCC members should accompany families and couples who are wounded and on the periphery. This is the Ministry of Compassionate Accompaniment. This includes mercy toward broken and fragile families and couples. There should be special outreach programs beginning with listening, accompanying, walking with before teaching (the

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<sup>193</sup> Eastern African SCCs can learn from Bishop Mario Grech of Gozo Diocese, Malta and president of the Maltese Episcopal Conference how the Gozo diocesan pastoral plan of families was restructured in order to be more effective in accompanying courting couples and the families of today.

In the synod we often spoke about the importance of proposing a pastoral journey that helps couples before and after marriage. In Gozo we propose a journey of marriage preparation lasting two years. During this course a priest and married couples accompany the courting couples so that their love matures humanly and spiritually while preparing for the sacrament of marriage. There is also the proposal of a catechetical accompaniment for young married couples, especially during the first five years of married life, that helps them to build their marriage on the gospel. The Diocesan Family Commission also offers journeys of faith for cohabitating, separated, and divorced remarried couples.

**Mario Grech, “Bishop Grech: ‘There Is a Need for Spreading the Gospel of the Family:’**

President of the Maltese Episcopal Conference Discusses Aspects Emanating From Synod on the Family, *ZENIT: The World Seen from Rome Daily Dispatch*, 28 October 2014, p. 19.

Emmaus model). See Numbers 2, 8, 28 and 45 of the *Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on the Family*.

This also includes the important pastoral and missionary outreach of SCCs. In a pastoral metaphor Pope Francis has called the Catholic Church a field hospital after battle. German Cardinal Walter Kaspar extended this metaphor to say that “the family too is a field hospital where it is necessary to bind many wounds.” We can extend this metaphor even further to say that the Small Christian Community as a Domestic Church is also a field hospital called to reach out to needy families, broken homes, to the homeless and to those people Pope Francis calls “the marginated and those on the periphery of society.”

- In parishes together with various lay movements SCC members should be united to families and to work with them to promote the living of the “Gospel of the family” in homes. See No. 2 of the *Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod*.
- SCCs should encourage Catholic men to organize themselves into groups, associations, or even small activist units dedicated to stopping the scourge of abuse in the home and in society.

In summary: Pope Francis’ challenge to all Catholics to “evangelize the peripheries and the marginated” is a special call. He explains: “Jesus renewed his call to each one of us to become his missionary disciples. May we perceive this call as the most important thing in our lives and share this gift with others, those near and far, even to the distant geographical and existential peripheries<sup>194</sup> of our world.”<sup>195</sup> No. 20 of *The Joy of*

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<sup>194</sup> These existential peripheries and margins are people and situations in pain and suffering.

*the Gospel* states: “All of us are asked to obey the Lord’s call to go forth from our own comfort zone in order to reach all the ‘peripheries’ in need of the light of the Gospel.”

This is part of the shift in mission being existential/situational as well as geographical/territorial. No. 120 states: “In virtue of their Baptism all members of the People of God have become missionary disciples.

Specialists continue to study the complex social and cultural reality of our contemporary world. In the follow-down to the Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops in Rome in October, 2014 on Family and Marriage it was proposed to emphasize SCCs composed of the following specialized groups:

- Youth (Generation Y 18-22 year olds)
- Young Adults (Generation Y 23-35 year olds)
- Engaged Couples
- Newly married Couples
- Married Couples with Little Children

These small communities would combine lectionary-based faith sharing and being a support group. The engaged couples and newly married couples could consult married couple companions (mentor couples) when necessary.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Pope Francis, “Message of Pope Francis for the Twenty-Ninth World Youth Day” (Palm Sunday, 13 April 2014), *Catholic Information Service for Africa (CISA) Email News Bulletin*. Issue No. 30, 11 April, 2013.

<sup>196</sup> Taken from Joseph Healey, “What Is The Way Forward? Where Do We Go From Here? Some Reflections on the Evangelizing Ministry of St. Paul Inside the Walls in Preparing for the Synod of Bishops Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly on the “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Modern World” in Rome from 4-25 October, 2015 in the Spirit and Vision of Pope Francis.” Madison, New Jersey: Unpublished Paper, 6 December, 2014. 6 pages. Under the “United States of America” under “North America” on the Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website at: [http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/inside\\_the\\_wall.pdf](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org/images/stories/pdf/inside_the_wall.pdf)

Indian psychologist and writer Father Sahaya Selvam, SDB explains that the *Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod* follows an adapted rendering of the See-Judge-Act formula which, in the recent decades, has become more used in pastoral reflection in the Catholic Church. The method is also referred to as the Pastoral Cycle. In the present document, seeing or listening consisted in openly perceiving and understanding the prevailing situation regarding marriage and family life in the world today... Almost every plenary session of the synod began with narratives from the [married] couples. They shared their commitment to the truth of the teaching of the church regarding marriage and family, but also brought to the attention of the clerics at the synod the struggles that accompany the commitment.” The stage of making judgment was led by the scripture and the Tradition of the Church. And, finally, a way forward has been proposed in pastoral accompaniment of the faithful.<sup>197</sup> This process also called the Pastoral Spiral is described many times in this article as the process of Eastern Africa SCCs.

The *Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod* serves as the *Lineamenta (Guidelines)* on the theme of "The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World." A new preparatory document based on this final document and containing "a series of main points to lead the discussions and to help in its reception and deepening" with 46 questions was sent to the world's bishops conferences at the beginning of December, 2014. The year between the synods "should take the path already done as a starting point and take this special opportunity to study issues and

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<sup>197</sup> Sahaya Selvam, "Bishops Integrate Truth and Mercy in Debate on Divorce and Homosexuals, *Daily Nation* Website, retrieved on 26 October, 2014, <http://mobile.nation.co.ke/lifestyle/CATHOLIC-Bishops-integrate-truth-and-mercy-in-debatE/-/1950774/2499484/-/format/xhtml/-/g1lakl/-/index.html>

promote discussion at the level of Episcopal Conferences, finding the means and the tools necessary to further involve also the different ecclesial bodies in the synodal reflection on the family."

Hopefully Eastern African SCCs will participate in this ongoing process of listening, discussion, debate, discernment and proposed pastoral responses.<sup>198</sup> The answers to the 46 questions will be sent to Rome by 15 April, 2015 and will be collated to produce the *Instrumentum Laboris (Working Document)* (to be ready by June, 2015) for the Synod of Bishops XIV Ordinary General Assembly to take place in Rome from 4-25 October, 2015.

It was pointed out that Africa has unique challenges and concerns (for example, polygamy, the influence of widespread poverty, economic injustice, war on family life, frozen ideas of culture and tradition usually rooted in powerful patriarchal hierarchies, etc.) and these issues will be addressed more at the October, 2015 synod.

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<sup>198</sup> The Catholic Church in England and Wales has launched a wide-ranging consultation of parishes and clergy ahead of next year's Synod on the Family. There is a period of spiritual reflection in each parish, and separately to hear the experiences of clergy, on the main "pastoral challenges" they encounter with families. Material was sent out to parishes and clergy after Christmas. The period of reflection will go on until June or July ahead of the synod in October, 2015. It is not so much a request for opinions as a request for testimony. The two great features of the Third Extraordinary Synod in October, 2014 were: On the one hand a resounding trumpet call in support of marriage and stability of family life. On the other hand an opportunity to express and strengthen the pastoral response of the Church in a wide variety of difficult and pressurised situations. The material sent out has this same balance. The results of this consultation will be made public.

Summarized from Christopher Lamb, "English and Welsh Bishops Call for Priests and Parishes To Make Voices Heard Ahead of Next Family Synod," Tablet Website, 14 November 2014. Retrieved on 18 November, 2014,

<http://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/1396/0/english-and-welsh-bishops-call-for-priests-and-parishes-to-make-voices-heard-ahead-of-next-family-synod>

At the same time it was emphasized that Africa is coming of age and that the African bishops at the October, 2014 synod had staked their claim to a say in the Catholic Church's teachings.<sup>199</sup> An Editorial in *America Magazine* states:

This is a dialogue that must include other voices that have been subdued in the past. The more confident presence of African bishops should be welcomed. In fact, the vibrant participation of representatives from all the fast-growing parts of the Catholic world needs to be encouraged.<sup>200</sup>

John Allen adds:

The upshot is that Africa has emerged as a genuine force in Catholic conversation, and Westerners need to get used to establishing trust before real dialogue can begin... In today's Catholic Church, Africans have both the numbers and the self-confidence to back up their concerns... If you want to get anything done in 21st century Catholicism, in other words, one great tip is to involve Africans early and often.<sup>201</sup>

During the next year the Eastern Africa SCCs can learn from the small group model or small parish discussion group model in Europe and North America:

The cardinal archbishop of Paris, France André Vingt-Trois, one of the president-delegates at the October meeting, revealed that in preparation for the 2014 synod he had set up small groups (around a dozen people in each group) in every parish throughout his archdiocese to discuss the themes that were on the agenda for that synod. "I will now do the same in preparation for the 2015 synod," he told a press conference in the Vatican.

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<sup>199</sup> See Tina Beattie, "After the Synod – A Journey into the Unknown," "Marginal Musings: Tina Beattie's Intermittent Reflections," retrieved on 25 October, 2014, <http://tina-beattie.blogspot.co.uk>

<sup>200</sup> "Editorial: Go in Peace," *America*, Vol. 211, No. 12 (10 November, 2014), p. 5, America Website, retrieved on 15 November, 2014, <http://americamagazine.org/issue/go-peace>

<sup>201</sup> John Allen, "In 21st Century Catholicism, You Can't Ignore Africa Any More," Crux Website, retrieved on 20 November, 2014, [http://www.cruxnow.com/church/2014/11/20/in-21st-century-catholicism-you-cant-ignore-africa-any-more/?s\\_campaign=crux:email:daily](http://www.cruxnow.com/church/2014/11/20/in-21st-century-catholicism-you-cant-ignore-africa-any-more/?s_campaign=crux:email:daily)

Cardinal Péter Erdö (Hungary), who had the key role of relator at the 2014 synod, said he had done something similar in preparation for that gathering. He had groups of married couples in almost every parish in his Budapest archdiocese whom he asked to discuss the themes for the recently concluded assembly. He plans to do likewise for the next one.<sup>202</sup>

## 9. Small Christian Communities in the Answers to the 46 Questions in the *Lineamenta* of the 2015 Synod of Bishops

Cardinal Lorenzo Baldisseri, General Secretary of the Synod of Bishops, wrote:

Accompanying this letter, which is being sent to episcopal conferences, the synods of the Eastern Catholic Churches *sui iuris*, the Union of Superiors General and the Roman Curia, is a copy of the *Lineamenta* ([http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20141209\\_lineamenta-xiv-assembly\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20141209_lineamenta-xiv-assembly_en.html)) composed of the *Relatio Synodi* and a series of questions on the reaction to this synodal document and a thorough examination of its contents, in the process of continuing the synodal journey already begun and in drafting the *Instrumentum Laboris* for the next synodal assembly.

The previously mentioned ecclesial entities are asked to choose a suitable manner to engage all components of the particular churches and academic institutions, organizations, lay movements and other ecclesial associations in an ample consultation of the People of God on the family, within the framework of the synodal process. Once this consultation is completed on the local level, the same ecclesial entities are to submit a summary of the results to the General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops by Easter, 15 April 2015. “Consequently, I

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<sup>202</sup> Gerald O’Connell, “Looking to the 2015 Synod,” *America*, Vol. 211, No. 13 (3 November, 2014), p. 24, America Website, retrieved on 13 November, 2014, <http://americamagazine.org/issue/looking-2015-synod>

ask Your Eminence/Excellency to send this document to dioceses with the request that it be widely circulated in deaneries and parishes so as to obtain the input of all components of the People of God in the preparation of the *Instrumentum Laboris*".<sup>203</sup>

The Introduction to Part III – “Confronting the Situation: Pastoral Perspectives”

states:

In examining Part III of the *Relatio Synodi*, it is important to be guided by the pastoral approach initiated at the Extraordinary Synod which is grounded in Vatican II and the Magisterium of Pope Francis. The episcopal conferences have the responsibility to continue to examine this part thoroughly and seek the involvement, in the most opportune manner possible, all levels of the local Church, thus providing concrete instances from their specific situations. Every effort should be made not to begin anew, but to continue on the path undertaken in the Extraordinary Synod as a point of departure.

## **COMMENTARY**

This statement clearly shows the process and methodology of the two synods.<sup>204</sup> The synods emphasize the importance of the documents of the Second Vatican Council and Pope Francis' *The Joy of the Gospel*. Francis is reopening

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<sup>203</sup> Lorenzo Baldisseri, “Letter of the Secretary General to the Episcopal Conferences Accompanying the Lineamenta of XIV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops,” 12 December 2014, Vatican Website, retrieved on 20 December, 2014, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/synod/documents/rc\\_synod\\_doc\\_20141212\\_lettera-lineamenta-xiv-assembly\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/synod/documents/rc_synod_doc_20141212_lettera-lineamenta-xiv-assembly_en.html)

<sup>204</sup> The Editorial in the 30 December 2014 issue of the *National Catholic Reporter* states: Perhaps Francis' greatest contribution as pope will be his embrace and advocacy for the Synod of Bishops as central to the governance and mission of the church. The two synods that Francis has called to discuss family life may result in changes in pastoral practices that will welcome Catholics back into full participation in the church, but the process the synods begin may well be their most important outcome. Francis is making of the synod what Pope Paul VI envisioned it to be in 1965: a body that would provide "for a continuance after the [Second Vatican] Council of the great abundance of benefits that ... result of our close collaboration with the bishops." NCR Website, retrieved on 30 December, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/news/people/editorial-person-year-2014>



the lifelines to Vatican II as the blueprint for his own vision and programs of renewal. He draws more on the theology of Pope Paul VI than St. John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI. He encourages concrete examples from specific pastoral situations.

While the term “Small Christian Communities” is not mentioned specifically in these questions, their life and ministry is contained to the references to families, parishes, associations and movements. Searching within the SCCs Website we found a lot of material:

Family: 42 results found.

Marriage: 20 results found.

The free online Ebook on “SCCs in Eastern Africa” has these references:

Family: 779 results found.

Marriage: 478 results found.

Here in Eastern Africa we realized the danger of just affirming current Catholic Church teaching and pastoral practice as in "how can the church help folks to live according to our truth." We tried to respond to Pope Francis' call to be “be bold and creative” in finding new pastoral solutions (“think outside the box”).

First to the key Preliminary Question: “Does the description of the various familial situations in the *Relatio Synodi* correspond to what exists in the church and society today [such as in Africa]? We said “An overall yes.” Then we named the “missing aspects” from our African experience and perspective]<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> These “missing aspects” and the following answers to the questions were collated from the following sources:

- The questions have a Western tone or viewpoint and sometimes lack a Global South perspective.
- Children are seen as the objects and receivers of pastoral and missionary care. Children can also be the subjects of promoting family relationships and family life, active participants in church life (for example, the liturgy) and agents of evangelization.
- Add “Traditionally Married” to Numbers 41-43.
- Specifically mention the challenge of HIV/AIDS in relation to family and marriage.
- Specifically mention the challenge of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).
- Specifically mention the challenge of child-headed households.
- Specifically mention the influence of witchcraft and superstition in African culture.

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Meeting of St. Joachim SCC, Kangemi, Nairobi, Kenya, 1 February, 2015.

SCCs Class on “SCCs Promote Family and Marriage Ministry in Africa Today,” 5 February, 2015 and on “SCCs Involvement in the 2015 Kenya Lenten Campaign on the theme *Build Our Family and Nation with Dignity*,” 19 February, 2015 at Tangaza University College, Nairobi, Kenya.

Meeting of St. Kizito SCC, Waruku, Nairobi, Kenya, 8 February, 2015.

Meeting of the Commission for Missions of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB)’s Annual General Meeting (AGM) at the Watakatifu Wote (All Saints) Pastoral Centre, Ngong Diocese, Kenya, 13 February, 2015.

Meeting of the Kenya Diocesan Family Life Coordinators at St. Joseph Conference Center, Karen, Nairobi, Kenya, 25 February, 2015.

Formation Meeting on “Better Pastoral Care of Marriages” of the St. John Paul II Evangelizing Teams in Nairobi, Kenya on 15 March, 2015.

Meeting of five people to collate the recommendations from the Formation Meeting in Nairobi, Kenya on 17 March, 2015.

Meeting of Representatives of the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) and Justice and Peace Commission with Mrs. Theresa Abuya to answer some of the questions, Nairobi, Kenya on 18 March, 2015.

Answers of Kenyan Dioceses to the questions.

Meeting of eight member team to consolidate the responses to the “Lineamenta” for the October, 2015 Synod of Bishops at the JJ McCarthy Centre, Nairobi, 7-8 April, 2015.

- The trend towards euthanasia is an alarming aspect in the intergenerational conflict.
- Specifically emphasize the importance of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in promoting family and marriage ministry in the world today. One example is *Bible* reading, reflection and study in SCCs.
- Specifically emphasize the importance of the Pontifical Missionary Childhood (PMC) in Catholic family life.
- More on traditional family and community values.
- More on “Rites of Passage” especially the communal spirit.
- More on good and responsible parenting.
- Contextualize the hopes of the document more.

Pope Francis' prayer intention for evangelization in February, 2015 was: “That married people who are separated may find welcome and support in the Christian community.” What are our SCCs doing to reach out to these people? Answers posted on the SCCs Facebook Page are found in Chapter 9.

Week Three (“Family and Social Morality”) of the Booklet of the *2015 Kenya Lenten Campaign* presented this question: “What can we do as family or Small Christian Community to promote Christian values in our families?”

In Eastern Africa SCC members focused on Questions 28-39, but we revised them in the Eastern African context. First, we identified 11 marriage situations/categories that need pastoral care ranging from engaged couples to

divorced and remarried couples. To make it more real we tried to put people in Kenya that we know in each situation/category.

Then we rewrote and answers some of the questions as follows:

1. How do SCC members guide and accompany engaged couples (in the middle of courtship)?<sup>206</sup> Based on the section “Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage” (Nos. 39 - 40) that states: “The synod recognized the steps taken in recent years to facilitate an effective preparation of young people for marriage, stressing, however, a need for a greater commitment of the entire Christian community in not only the preparation but also the initial years of family life.” In Eastern Africa SCCs are an important part of the “entire Christian community.”
2. How do SCC members guide and accompany married couples with children who are not married in the Catholic Church?<sup>207</sup> Based on the section “Pastoral Care of Couples Civilly Married, [Traditionally Married] or Living Together<sup>208</sup> in Their Preparation for Marriage” (Nos. 41-43) that states: “The Synod discussed diverse situations resulting from a multiplicity of cultural and economic factors, practices grounded in tradition, and the difficulty of young people to make lifetime commitments.”

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<sup>206</sup> Swahili: *Ni kwa namna gani wanajumuiya wanashauriana na kuaambatana na wanaochumbiana?*

<sup>207</sup> Swahili: *Ni kwa namna gani wanajumuiya wanashauriana na kuambatana na wanandoa na watoto wao ambao hawajaoana rasmi katika Kanisa Katoliki?*

<sup>208</sup> This describes cohabitation or the “come we stay” phenomenon in Eastern Africa. There are many Swahili translations, but young people themselves like *kusukuma maisha* (a temporary, “for the time being” arrangement) and *mke wa deni* (a private, almost hidden, transitory arrangement without the dowry being paid). Another popular slang expression is “UN” referring to a young man in a Nairobi slum taking in a poor, vulnerable young woman into his flat. He provides her with the necessities of life in exchange for sexual favors. Compare with a hookup culture in the USA: a culture that accepts and encourages casual sexual encounters, including one-night stands and other related activity, which focus on physical pleasure without necessarily including emotional bonding or long-term commitment. It is generally associated with Western late adolescent behavior and, in particular, American college culture.

3. How do SCC members accompany married couples in their first five years of marriage?<sup>209</sup> Based on “Accompanying Married Couples in the Initial Years of Marriage” (No. 40).

In our SCCs Course at Tangaza University College on Thursday, 5 February, 2015 we discussed two important topics. How SCCs can supply the extra formation needed for longer and deeper marriage preparation? How SCCs can provide pastoral care for Catholic couples who are separated, divorced and happily remarried “outside” the church?

In answering these questions an on-going challenge is to track creatively the social, economic, political, cultural and religious changes in Africa today.<sup>210</sup>

- According to the *Urban Dictionary Mpango Wa Kando* (Swahili for “a sideway or outside plan or program” refers to a side relationship or concurrent partnership) or a “jumpoff” is a casual sexual partner or girlfriend, a woman of dubious sexual practices, a mistress, an extramarital partner or a person that is usually only being used for sex while the man is married or in a serious relationship. This is increasing for men as polygamy is decreasing. Even wealthy married women in cities in Africa have these side relationships.
- Young engaged couples are spending so much time on planning the social sides of their marriages (funding raising gatherings, the wedding reception, related parties, etc.) that they give too little time to the religious side and to the specific marriage preparations.

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<sup>209</sup> Swahili: *Ni kwa namna gani wanajumuiya wanaambatana na wanandoa katika ile miaka yao mitano ya kwanza?*

<sup>210</sup> Based on various research and conversations with people such as with Kenyan lay women Mary Getui who teaches courses on Marriage and Sexuality at CUEA and Tangaza.

The Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) answered the 46 questions in a 37-page document sent to the Vatican on 15 April, 2015. SCCs are mentioned 23 times.

Highlights include:

- Specifically emphasize the importance of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in promoting family and marriage ministry in the world today. One example is *Bible* reading, reflection and study in SCCs.
- The elderly and the ill can be taken care of by their Small Christian Communities.
- Formation of Small Christian Communities to support and strengthen families of believers and those faithful to the bond of marriage
- Agents of evangelization such as Small Christian Community animators are urgently needed.
- Often the Local Church of Kenya forms supportive groups to cater for the people's special needs, for example, in the Small Christian Communities.
- In Kenya the Catholic Church have 45,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs). A SCC is a communion of families in the neighborhood. Many are lectionary-based faith sharing groups. On weekly basis these SCCs members read the Gospel of the following Sunday and connect Jesus' teaching to their everyday life.
- The SCCs are domestic churches and through them the Christians and their families are strengthened to be courageous and faithful.
- *Hodi Hodi* (Swahili for "door to door") visitations through Small Christian Communities is a way of empowering families so that they are also evangelizers to each other.

- The Church's pastoral activity towards families, especially those which are wounded and fragile, includes accepting them, journeying with them and visiting them through the SCCs.
- Tangaza University College, a constitutive college of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), in Nairobi has two courses for future priests and other pastoral workers in which married people teach about the family, family values and marriage. The two courses are "Family Ministry" and "Small Christian Communities as a New Model of Church in Africa Today."
- SCCs are starting a Ministry of Pastoral Accompaniment of newly married couples.
- In Kenya we have *wahudumu wa dini* (lay ministries of religious education, family life catechesis and marriage counseling) in SCCs and other apostolic groups.
- There is urgent need to form support groups especially through the networks of family associations, SCCs and other groups.
- Where SCCs are a pastoral priority they offer support to parents in raising their children.
- Allow children to interact and witness to each other in the SCCs and in *Bible Studies* program.
- Both parents (husband and wife) should participate in a SCC together. This models family participation for the children.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), "Results of the Consultation in Kenya on the 46 Questions in the *Lineamenta* on *The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World*, Nairobi: Unpublished Report, 2015. See Jim McDermott, "Kenya and the Survey for the Synod on

On 8 May, 2015 the National Family Life Program of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) General Secretariat published a 46-page booklet: *Relatio Synodi 2015 – Pastoral Guidelines for a Process of Discussion and Action*. The Online Version is *Family and Marriage in Kenya Today: Pastoral Guidelines for a Process of Discussion and Action*, <http://www.kccb.or.ke/home/news-2/pastoral-guidelines-for-a-process-of-discussion-in-action>

The “Preface” by Kenyan Bishop Salesius Mugambi, the Chairman of the National Family Life Program, states:

We invite you to participate in a very important “discernment process” in identifying the challenges and finding the pastoral solutions to family and marriage in Kenya today...Most recently the Kenyan Bishops sent to Rome on 15 April, 2015 a 37-page document called “Results of the Consultation in Kenya on the 46 Questions in the *Lineamenta on The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World*. The opening words state: “The Local Church in Kenya, and in particular the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), is happy to share its pastoral experiences of family and marriage in Kenya with the Catholic Church worldwide”... Due to the positive response to our answers from Kenya, we decided to edit this document and print it in [this] user-friendly booklet form. We hope that you will pray over these answers, reflect on them and discuss them in various meetings coordinated by our Family Life Offices, in small groups involved in family and marriage ministry and in 45,000 SCCs in Kenya. Pope Francis urges us to find concrete, practical, pastoral solutions for our local African reality. As part of our ongoing pastoral process, the Family Life National Office will collate your comments, reflections and pastoral solutions and give them to the Kenyan delegates before they go to Rome in October, 2015.<sup>212</sup>

The booklet includes a very useful Appendix of “Acronyms and Meanings” of ecclesiastical words.

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the Family,” *America Magazine Website*, retrieved on 18 April. 2015, <http://www.americamagazine.org/content/dispatches/kenya-and-survey-synod-family>

<sup>212</sup> Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) General Secretariat, *Relatio Synodi 2015 – Pastoral Guidelines for a Process of Discussion and Action*. Nairobi: Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2015, pp. 3-4.



Copies were distributed throughout Kenya for prayer, discussion, reflection and eventual implementation on the local level.

## **10. Small Christian Communities in the *Instrumentum Laboris* of the 2015**

### **Synod of Bishops**

The *Instrumentum Laboris* was published on 23 June, 2015 and will serve as the “Working Document” for the October, 2015 meeting. The text is arranged around three pillars: First, the challenges that the family faces today in different parts of the world. Second, the discernment of the family vocation that brings out the beauty and the importance of the family in the light of the Christian Gospel. Third, the mission of the family today. Each pillar will take up a week of the discussions at the 4-25 October assembly.

Plans are underway to update the working method of the synod for the October meeting. Pope Francis, like Pope Benedict XVI before him, has tried to make the synod less a gathering of bishops reading speeches and more a forum for discussing, questioning, studying and praying about the church's response to various pastoral problems.

## **11. Case Study of an Eastern African SCC**

A Case Study of how an African SCC is involved in family ministry and the family apostolate is St. Kizito SCC that is described in many places in this Ebook. One weekly gathering reflected on “Family and Faith,” the theme of Week Two in the 2014 Kenyan Lenten Campaign booklet *How Can We Be One?...for the Sanctification and Salvation of All People*. The meeting took place at the Maryknoll Society House near Waruku in St. Austin’s Parish in Nairobi, Kenya on 9 March, 2014. I am an ordinary

member of this SCC. To show solidarity with SCCs in other Eastern African countries the table in the middle of the circle of SCC members was covered with an African *chitenge* cloth that had the title “St. Charles Lwanga Catholic Parish, Regiment Church Lusaka, Zambia” with a drawing of St. Charles Lwanga and the names of all the SCCs in the parish. A striking Ethiopian cross was placed on the table. There were 24 participants: 13 women, nine men and two children. All were lay people except four African Franciscan Religious Sisters of the Immaculate Novices and one expatriate missionary priest (myself).

The SCC members used the three steps of the "See," "Judge" and "Act" method/process for the Second Sunday of Lent, 16 March, 2014 as follows:

1. Analyze and discuss the drawing (cartoon) on page 16-17.
2. Read the story in Step One (“See”): “Mr. and Mrs. Kivu and Their Two Children” on page 18-19.
3. Read the Situational Analysis in Step Two (“Judge”) on pages 19-22.
4. Read the Gospel (*Matthew 17:1-9*) and the scripture commentary.
5. Answer question 3 in Step Three (“Act”): “Amidst the challenges facing the family, how is your Small Christian Community helping its members to cope with these challenges?”<sup>213</sup>

A section from the booklet on the importance of African family values was highlighted:

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<sup>213</sup> Kenyan lay woman Lucy Nderitu reflected on this question in her St. Matthias Mulumba SCC of Don Bosco Parish, Makuyu, Nairobi Archdiocese on 1 March, 2014. In commenting on how Pope Francis wants to examine the pastoral challenges experienced by family at the October, 2014 Synod, she emphasized that the laws touching on family and marriage passed in the Kenyan Parliament do not take into account African values and Christian values. We have to challenge the wrong application of these laws that may harm our families. We have to train our children in the right direction because they will have the families of the future.

Marriage and family life are important to each and all of us. We all come from families. We all have a mother, father, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, nephews, and nieces. Everyone desires a good, warm and loving family where people care for one another. If we don't have these relatives, we feel deprived. A warm and loving family is God's plan for each of us. From the very beginning, when God created our first parents, Adam and Eve, God had a plan for marriage and family life.<sup>214</sup>

In connecting the theme of family to the Gospel of the Transfiguration, one member said that God has a plan for all humanity, for Jesus as Savior and Redeemer, and for all our African families. Suggestions for action included:

- The family is the first school. As a “communion of families” our St. Kizito SCC is a school too that has a mission to educate.
- Remove the backbiting,<sup>215</sup> jealousy and critical feelings among SCC members and their families.
- Prayer is very practical. We should pray more for our family problems and our family needs.

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<sup>214</sup> Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *How Can We Be One?* p. 20.

<sup>215</sup> Some years ago SCC members in Tanzania composed an “African Way of the Cross Following Our Local African Situation Especially the Sufferings, Crosses, and Problems of Our Everyday Life.” Women especially, based on their life experiences, composed the 13th Station: “Jesus is Taken Down from the Cross.” Theme: “Backbiting, Calumny, Contempt, False Rumors, Gossip, and Insults.” This is described in the story “Living an African Way of the Cross” in Joseph Healey, *What Language Does God Speak: African Stories about Christmas and Easter*, Nairobi: St. Paul Publications Africa, 1989, pp. 65-69, Healey and Sybertz, *Towards An African Narrative Theology*, pp. 243-246 and in “African Lenten and Easter Stories” on the African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website, retrieved 18 August 2014, <http://www.afriprov.org/index.php/african-stories-by-season/12-easter-stories/53-african-way-of-the-cross-following-our-local-african-situation-especially-the-sufferings-crosses-and-problems-of-our-everyday-life.html>

- As part of our Lenten action, visit the *Amani na Wema* ("Peace and Goodness") Children's Home (AIDS orphans) located in the geographical area of St. Kizito SCC in St. Austin's Parish.

In St Kizito SCC a Kenyan married laywoman, Jackline Oduor, is responsible for marriage ministry and a Kenyan married layman, is the assistant. Unfortunately they have not received special training for their leadership roles. Helping young people in the small community to sacramentalize their marriages (regularize/have marriages blessed in church) is relatively easy. The two main challenges are advising on mixed marriages (such as a Catholic and a Protestant, a Catholic and a Muslim) and counseling couples with marital problems.

Two SCC members, Paul Mboya and Elizabeth Alouch, exchanged their marriage vows at St. Austin's Parish on Saturday, 14 June, 2014. Their invitation card has this powerful prayer: "May the love we share today mean more tomorrow. May it give dreams and wishes to pursue. So dear Lord, from this day lock our hearts together and keep the key for life."

Two SCC members, Tobias and Winfred, catered the enjoyable reception in the parish hall afterwards. There was plenty of good food and lively singing and dancing. The next day, Sunday, 15 June, the weekly *Bible Service* of the small community based on the Gospel of the following Sunday took place in the newly wed couple's home in Waruku. There was a special blessing of the couple, their home and all the SCC members.

St. Kizito SCC helped one of its faithful members, Kimori Conard, to prepare for his marriage with Jackline Kwamboka in Nairobi on 6 December, 2014. It was a long

collaborative process. Conrad's SCC in his original home parish in Kisii Diocese was also involved. Kwambuka's SCC in her original home parish in Kisii Diocese and her St. Elizabeth SCC in St. Francis of Assisi Gatina Outstation in Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish in Nairobi were also involved. In addition to St. Kizito SCC itself helping in the marriage preparations and making a financial contribution, some SCC members were part of a group called "Friends of Conrad Kimori." They met weekly to raise funds for the wedding. Then many SCCs members actively participated in the wedding at St. Francis of Assisi Gatina Church and celebrated together at the reception.

As a happily married couple Kimori and Jackline now live in Waruku and are very involved in their SCC. They are very active in encouraging other young people to get married in the Catholic Church. They each gave a Marriage Testimony during the Formation Meeting of the St. John Paul II Evangelizing Teams in Nairobi, Kenya on 15 March, 2015. They described the steps in their marriage preparation and their present married life together. Jackline said, "we ask experienced marriage couples to journey with us"<sup>216</sup> -- in the spirit of accompaniment. In a later conversation on the many problems connected with the dowry in Kenyan society, Jackline said "my parents were not after the dowry; they wanted to help my growing faith."<sup>217</sup>

Now the SCC members are helping Agnes Alitsi and Ben Wanjala to finish the steps of their marriage preparation. Some of the SCC members serve in the new Ministry of Marriage Accompaniment. Some married couples are Marriage Pastoral Accompaniers before and after the church marriage.

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<sup>216</sup> Jackline Kwamboka, Formation Meeting of the St. John Paul II Evangelizing Teams. Nairobi, Kenya, 15 March, 2015.

<sup>217</sup> Jackline Kwamboka in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 17 March, 2015.

The active involvement of men is a big factor in St. Kizito SCC. On Sunday, 17 August, 2014 SCC members met for the first time in the new House of Charity Children Home. 33 participated (13 laymen, 12 laywomen, four religious sisters, two children, one priest and one seminarian). SCC members visited and prayed for the 17 abandoned babies (all under three years old) in the home. Helping abandoned babies is one of the challenges in responding to the harsh reality of family life and marriage in Kenya today. SCC members reflected on the Gospel of the following Sunday (21st Sunday in Ordinary Time). A number of men gave reflections on the themes of faith, inculturation and authority and offered some Prayers of the Faithful.

There are many men in St. Kizito SCC. Some are leaders who are active in promoting family and marriage values. Why the difference from other SCCs in Nairobi that have very few male members?<sup>218</sup> Three reasons stand out. First, men from lower income families seem to participate more in SCCs than men from wealthy families. Most SCC *Bible Services* take place on Sunday afternoons. The more wealthy men are out spending money. The poorer men in the informal settlements are at home with their children and free to participate in their SCCs. Second, St. Kizito has a healthy mix of many different Kenyan ethnic groups and originally from all over Kenya. There is no dominant ethnic group that is common in other parts of Kenya. All ethnic groups are welcome and participate. Third, husbands have moved to Nairobi for work and live with some of their older children who are in school while their wives remain back in the villages with some of the younger children. For example, the chairperson (“minister of

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<sup>218</sup> Compare with St. Catherine of Siena SCC in Queen of Heaven Parish in Karen, Nairobi. At the weekly SCC *Bible Sharing/Bible Reflection* on Monday, 28 July, 2014 there were one man and 16 women. The reasons given: some of the SCC members are widows, their husbands are not Catholics; their husbands are working; and their husbands are just not interested.

the ministers” or “servant of the servants”) is a Luyia who lives in Waruku while his wife lives in Kakamega in Western Kenya. The secretary is a Kamba who lives in Waruku while his wife lives in Kitui in Eastern Kenya.

On Sunday, 7 September, 2014 members of St. Kizito SCC and St. Peter Mwamba SCC had a joint Recollection Day. There was a total of 51 participants. – 46 adults and five children. The overall theme was “The Importance of the Family and Marriage in Kenya Today.” The first session was on “Forgiveness and the Family Tree” and the second session was on “Our Experience of Family and Marriage Ministry in Kenya Today.” One learning was that the lay ministers of children, youth and marriage in our SCCs need special training.

After the publication of the English text of the "Final Report of the Third Extraordinary Synod" (18 October, 2014), members of St. Kizito SCC are implementing two recommendations of how SCCs can be involved in the pastoral care of married couples:

No. 39 on "Guiding Engaged Couples in Their Preparation for Marriage:"

Experienced SCC couples should pastorally accompany and guide engaged couples.

No. 40 on "Accompanying the Married Couples in Their Initial Years of Marriage:"

Experienced SCC couples should pastorally accompany young married couples.

First, experienced couples in St. Kizito SCC should be chosen for the ministry of accompaniers and guiders. Then they should be trained in their specific ministries. There should be training programs for married couple accompaniers (mentor couples) and other facilitators/formators/presenters/ trainers. Emphasize Train the Trainers (TOT)

Workshops for parishes, schools and marriage programs. All this should be in the context of lengthening and deepening the pre-marital catechesis and the post-marital catechesis.

Two ongoing challenges are:

- How SCC members should accompany families and couples who are wounded and on the periphery.
- How in parishes together with various lay movements SCC members should be united to families and to work with them to promote the living of the “Gospel of the family” in homes.

## **12. 2014-2015 as the “Years of the Family and Marriage”**

The closing of the 2012-2013 Year of Faith at the end of November, 2013 opened the door to a new theme for SCCs in Eastern Africa: 2014-2015 as the “Years of the Family and Marriage.” This is part of SCCs’ active participation in preparing for the two World Synod of Bishops Meetings in Rome. Many dioceses have officially declared 2014 as the “Year of the Family” such as: Dar es Salaam Archdiocese, Tanzania; Johannesburg Archdiocese, South Africa; Machakos Diocese, Kenya; Moshi Diocese, Tanzania; Mwanza Archdiocese, Tanzania; Nairobi Archdiocese, Kenya; Ngong Diocese, Kenya (the motto on banners is *The family that prays together stays together*); and Shinyanga Diocese, Tanzania. Various Catholic institutions have declared 2014 as the “Year of the Family.” In its information posters the Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA) in Nairobi includes the saying *A family that prays together stays together*.

Machakos Diocese in Kenya has over 5,000 SCCs. The theme of its 2014 Diocesan Calendar is: “Called to Emulate the Holy Family.” This helps to remind



us that the first SCC is the Holy Family.<sup>219</sup> The diocese's 10-year report has a section on "The Year of the Family." First in reviewing the 2012-2013 "The Year of Faith" it states: "Much was accomplished from the Small Christian Communities' level to the diocesan level."<sup>220</sup> Then SCCs are seen in the context of the family that is the smallest unit of our society.

Mwanza Archdiocese in Tanzania also has an excellent 2014 Archdiocesan Calendar on "The Year of the Family." Archbishop Jude Thaddeus Ruwa'ichi's emphasis on family values can be found in Chapter 10.

The theme of the Paulines Publications Africa 2014 Calendar is "Family Calendar with Pope Francis." The Paulines have a wide range of pamphlets, booklets and books on family life including the "Family Today Series" and the "Joy of Living Series." These are easily affordable and can be a regular part of SCC meetings and individual family meetings and discussions.

The theme of New People Media Center *Mission Calendar 2015* is "Family and Evangelization" with quotations on the family and mission for each month taken from synod documents, Pope Francis, Vatican II and other sources.

In 2014 the monthly "*Mwaki*" (Gikuyu for "SCC") Radio Program on CORO FM in Nairobi focused on "SCCs Promote the Pastoral Care of Family and Marriage."<sup>221</sup> This theme was also used in a Swahili program (called *Jumuiya*

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<sup>219</sup> Cardinal Berhaneyesus Souraphiel writes: "Family is facing so many challenges nowadays! May the Holy Family, Jesus - Mary - and Joseph, pray for Christian Families all over the world." Email message to the author, 12 June, 2014.

<sup>220</sup> *Journey of 10 Years Achievements. Catholic Diocese of Machakos. Bishop Martin Kivuva, Machakos: Privately Printed, 2014, p. 19.*

<sup>221</sup> The monthly themes were as follows:

MARCH	- helping young couples to solemnize their marriage in the church
APRIL	- helping marriages with problems
MAY	- issue of divorce

*Ndogo Ndogo, Oyee!*) and an English program on Kenya Broadcasting Corporation (KBC).

“Family Catechism” and “Family Catechesis” were two themes in Week Two on “Family and Faith” in the Kenyan Lenten Campaign 2014 booklet.<sup>222</sup> Family is vital in passing on a living faith on to the next generation. In bold print the booklet states: “Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore, must be recognized as the primary and principal educators.”<sup>223</sup>

One is reminded that 35 years ago in October, 1980 over 200 bishops from some 90 countries met in Rome for the first World Synod of the Bishops on the Family. The full title was: “On the Role of the Christian Family in the Modern World.” It was the first synod of the papacy of St. John Paul II and ultimately resulted in his 1981 apostolic exhortation on the family called *The Family in the Modern World (Familiaris Consortio)*. It emphasized the family as the “domestic church,” the place where Christian religion is learned, experienced, lived.

Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa are helping its members in this family catechesis. Education of children starts in the family, in the home. A SCC is a communion of families. The SCC is an important support group for families – for the

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JUNE - religious education for your children

JULY - tackling various addictions

AUGUST - single motherhood

SEPTEMBER - building the family culture

OCTOBER - celebrating marriages in church

NOVEMBER - stock taking of what we have done since March

<sup>222</sup> Nairobi Archdiocese has conducted “Training of Trainers” (TOTs) Workshops to train people from every deanery (both clergy and lay) on the theme and weekly topics in the booklet. In this way both the process and content get down to the SCC members on the local level. Research over many years clearly shows that SCC leaders and animators need regular training in the use and application of the booklets especially the process/methodology of starting from life experience (a story in Step One -- “See”).

<sup>223</sup> Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, *How Can We Be One?* p. 21.

parents and the children alike. The SCC is also a place for religious education, pastoral care and evangelization. SCCs can promote a family culture. One specific challenge is the education of children in irregular marriages.

An interesting Case Study is the St. Andrew Kaggwa Catechetical Training Center in Mumias (also called the Mumias CTC) in Kakamega Diocese, Kenya. During the two year residence course the 15 couples (the catechist and spouse) form a SCC. Each couple has a specific ministry in the SCC, for example, Marriage Counselor. This couple counsels the other couples if problems arise in their marriages. If there is tension between couples themselves the chairperson (another catechist) tries to bring about a reconciliation. During the course talks are given on SCCs and family catechesis. Two of the books required for the catechists' training are *Small Christian Communities Today: Capturing the New Moment and Building the Church as Family of God: Evaluation of Small Christian Communities in Eastern Africa*.<sup>224</sup>

St. Matia Mulumba Catechetical Training Center in Mityana, Uganda has a similar SCC plan. The 60 catechists (presently 45 men and 15 women) form five SCCs each with a priest chaplain. Many liturgical and pastoral activities pass through the SCCs. On Wednesdays the five SCCs read and reflect on the Gospel of the following Sunday.<sup>225</sup>

"The Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization," was the theme of the Formation Meetings of the St. John Paul II Parish

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<sup>224</sup> Based on the author's conversation with Kenyan diocesan priest Father Vincent Lumumba in Nairobi, Kenya, 18 June 2014.

<sup>225</sup> Based on the author's conversation with Ugandan diocesan priest Father Emmanuel Katongole in Nairobi, Kenya, 27 June 2014.

Evangelizing Teams in Nairobi, Kenya in 2014. The theme on Sunday, 16 February, 2014 was: “Using the Small Christian Communities (SCCs) Method of “See,” “Judge” and “Act” to Reflect on Key Pastoral Problems Related to Family and Marriage in Kenya Today.” After wide consultation on the real issues in family and marriage in Kenya today (*hali halisi* in Swahili), the participants divided into SCCs to reflect on some of the following topics:

- *Helping young couples/couples with children to get married in a Catholic Church.*
- *Counseling couples with marriage problems.*
- *Divorce caused by financial pressures.*
- *Advising single mothers on raising their children.*
- *Increasing number of abortions.*
- *Helping children and young people who have addictions including alcoholism, drugs, excessive attachment to electronic devices/gadgets (computer games, internet surfing, online music, social media), gambling and pornography.*
- *Religious education for your children.*
- *Jobs for Youth/Problem of Youth Unemployment*<sup>226</sup>

After discussing the meaning of the topic, SCC members looked up *Bible* passages on the topic and then discussed the practical solutions and actions to be taken. Some of the influences and factors involved in these problems and challenges included (alphabetically):

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<sup>226</sup> This is a problem that affects the social, economic and pastoral life of families throughout Africa. High unemployment of youth affects the stability of families and marriages.

- bad local environment
- careless use of money
- curiosity
- effects of poverty
- financial pressures
- generational gap
- lack of communications
- lack of honesty and trust
- losing job
- no children
- no prayer life in the family
- parental neglect
- partner has other relationships
- selfishness
- stress

Under solutions it was recommended that the SCC can be a support system and “home” for its members especially in African cities. Regular prayer in the SCCs is very important including teaching the children how to pray. SCC members can work with professional counselors and groups such as Couples for Christ, Family Life Ministries, Marriage Encounter, Pre-Cana, Retrouvaille and 12 Step Groups (Al-Anon, Alcoholics Anonymous, etc.), etc.

One of the best ways of celebrating the “2014-2015 Year of the Family and Marriage” is to emphasize these priorities in the annual “Days” and “Events”

of the SCCs, apostolic groups and parishes. The Catholic Men Association celebrated a National Night Vigil of Prayers with the motto *Good Family, Good Church* on 23 May, 2014 at Karen, Nairobi. Mwalimu Simon Rurinja, a member of our Eastern Africa SCCs Training Team, spoke on “Why Divorce is More Rampant in Christian Marriage than in Traditional Marriage.”

Queen of Apostles Parish in Nairobi, Kenya had an interesting family plan in 2014. Annually all the SCCs in the parish have a lively choir competition when each small community performs the same new religious song in Swahili composed by a Kenyan priest. It is a special teaching moment. The message of the song that emphasizes African Christian values is as important as the skill of the singers. The competition builds up teamwork and collaboration in the practice sessions of the individual SCCs and a sense of solidarity throughout the whole parish. In 2014 the themes of love, joy and sharing appeared in the Swahili song *Familia ya Kikristu* (“The Family of Christ”). Various family values were highlighted. The preliminary completion started at the outstation level and moved towards choosing the SCC parish winner in a festive grand finale.<sup>227</sup>

Various workshops and seminars are being conducted on the overall theme “Year of the Family and Marriage.” Leaders of 12 SCCs in Imara Seko Outstation in Mwanhuzi Parish, Shinyanga Diocese, Tanzania participated in a two day workshop on 27-28 June, 2014. Every SCC member is a missionary by virtue of his or her Baptism. Members should proclaim the Good News of Salvation and be active evangelizers. The church is not a building, but a community of believers.

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<sup>227</sup> Based on a conversation with Kenyan layman Steve Mwangi, a member of St. Peter SCC in Thome 1 Estate, St. Gabriel Outstation, Queen of Apostles Parish, Ruaraka in Nairobi on 13 June, 2014.

We should focus on our heavenly home, rather than earthly values and priorities. Young people should be encouraged to get married in the Catholic Church so they can receive communion.<sup>228</sup>

Another example is St. Jude Catholic Church, Doonholm, Nairobi, Kenya. Its Family Day is celebrated every year on 28 October, the Feast Day of St. Jude Thaddeus. SCCs participate in the liturgy such as bringing up the Offertory Gifts.

Another opportunity is Good Shepherd Sunday also called World Vocations Sunday that is celebrated on the Fourth Sunday after Easter with the Gospel story of Jesus as the Good Shepherd from St. *John*. Traditionally this day focused specifically on vocations to the priesthood and religious life. But now guidelines from the Vatican encourage prayers for vocations to all walks of life including married people and families. The 11 May, 2014 Vocations Sunday Poster of the Kenya Pontifical Missionary Societies (PMS) has the theme: "Witness to the Truth." It has photos of an African bishop ordaining a priest, African religious sisters praying together and a groom at a marriage ceremony putting the ring on his bride's finger. By extension we can pray for the vocation to be SCC members and members of apostolic groups.

The Synod of Bishops XIV Ordinary General Assembly will take place in Rome in October, 2015 and will "seek working guidelines in the pastoral care of the person and the family." *New People Magazine* will introduce a new section in 2015 called "Family on Mission." Married couples will be invited to write articles on the following suggested themes:

- "Marriage as a Vocation:" January-February, 2015

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<sup>228</sup> Information supplied by Simon Rurinjah.

- “Praying within the Family:” March-April, 2015
- “Education of the Children:” May-June, 2015
- “Family: The Domestic Church:” June-July, 2015
- “Evangelizing as a Family:” September-October, 2015.
- “Responsible Parenthood:” November-December, 2015

Married couples in SCCs are challenged to volunteer to write some of these articles. The theme of the “Mission Calendar 2015” of the New People Media Center is “Family and Evangelization.”

Many catechetical and liturgical materials are being produced that can be used in SCCs like *Together as One: Catechetical Sessions for Married Couples* (Arua Diocese, Uganda Publications). This is an 84-page booklet with 13 catechetical sessions for married couples and designed to be led by a married couple (or by a married man and a married woman).

In summary: During this “2014-2015 Years of the Family and Marriage” SCC members in Eastern Africa are helping young people to have a sacramental marriage in church and helping to reconcile couples who are having difficulties in their marriages. Parish-based SCCs<sup>229</sup> have many opportunities to promote family ministry, family life

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<sup>229</sup> Marriage experts and marriage advocates from all over the world signed an open letter in June, 2014 addressed to Pope Francis and the members of the 2014 Synod on the Family that stated:

Perhaps the boldest new way we can evangelize married couples (and by extension their children’s future marriages) is to build small communities of married couples who support each other unconditionally in their vocations to married life. These communities would provide networks of support grounded in the bonds of faith and family, commitment to lifelong marriage, and responsibility to and for each other.

The letter also recommended “creating small clusters of married couples at the parish level for mutual support.”



apostolate, family evangelization, family catechesis, family values and marriage catechesis in their parishes and other places in Eastern Africa. This contributes to the ongoing development of the identity and pastoral mission of the Church as Family of God in Africa.

### 13. Toward Bold and Creative Pastoral Solutions in Africa

In No. 33 of *The Joy of the Gospel* Pope Francis says:

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way.” I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, style and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory. I encourage everyone to apply the guidelines found in this document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear. The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.<sup>230</sup>

Thus we are challenged to this task of rethinking in a communal search and in wise and realistic pastoral discernment. In various documents and speeches Pope Francis explains this new process. Pope Francis says that he is open to changing Catholic Church regulations (NOT doctrine) for pastoral reasons, that is, finding a “pastoral solution.” He says if there is a consensus of the recommendations of bishops on the local level (for example, a national or

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“Marriage Experts Send Open Letter to Pope, Synod Members: Underline Challenges Facing Family, Timeless Truths About Marriage,” *ZENIT: The World Seen From Rome*, 29 September, 2014. Thus small communities of married couples can be an important type of SCC.

<sup>230</sup> Magesa insightfully commented: John Paul II’s papacy and the nearly eight years of his successor Benedict XVI (2005-2013) saw some practical retrenchment from the theological vision of Vatican II, something which, after Benedict’s surprise resignation on 28 February, 2014, Pope Francis his successor, has been trying to undo since his election on 13 March. Laurenti Magesa, “Endless Quest,” p. 9.

regional episcopal conference) on a particular pastoral issue, change is possible in the context of a process of subsidiarity (decentralization) and collegiality.<sup>231</sup>

More specifically Pope Francis said: “We are on the way towards a deeper matrimonial pastoral care.”<sup>232</sup> He recommends that we should respond pastorally to the facts on the ground and not try to impose an ideological solution based on some ideal that rarely exists in the real world. Francis seems to favor a more pastoral approach to the equally perplexing questions of “invalid” marriages -- couples who do not get married in church in the first place and couples who remarry outside the church without getting an annulment. Regarding the Eucharist, in No. 47 of *The Joy of the Gospel* he says: “The Eucharist, although it is the fullness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.”

A key issue is finding a pastoral solution to the two meanings of the “Eucharistic Famine” (also called the “Eucharistic Hunger”) in Africa today that are described as follows:

- Due to the lack of priests on any given Sunday in Africa most Catholics (on an average 60% but up to up to 80% in some surveys) participate in a “Sunday Service without a Priest” (especially in rural areas) where there is no Holy Communion rather than participate in a regular mass. This is popularly called “the Eucharistic Famine.” In a few of these services communion is distributed by the catechist or by a trained and installed lay leader.

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<sup>231</sup> [In an interview with the author at Georgetown University on 9 October, 2014, Ladislaus Orsy confirmed that](#) “affective collegiality” involves a consultative process by the world bishops while “effective collegiality” is involves a deliberative process (decision-making that includes voting to reach a consensus). Francis wants national bishops’ conferences to be more involved in the collegial process and ideally present a consensus view on a particular pastoral topic from the grassroots level. The Holy Spirit works through the consensus of these local bishops.

<sup>232</sup> Francis, *Vatican Information Service*, 31 July, 2013, p. 20.

While statistics vary here is a dramatic Case Study from Uganda:

With such a huge area to cover, St. Matia Mulumba Parish in Irundu in Jinja Diocese, Uganda has developed in a typically African way – with a fully involved laity running most of the parish activities. Because of the vastness of the parish and lack of transport, fewer than one per cent of parishioners are able to attend one of the six Sunday Masses; but there are 36 sub-centers where Sunday worship (a “Sunday Service Without a Priest” or “Liturgy of the Word”) is offered without clergy. This is the main Sunday worship for the vast majority. A full-time catechist leads a team of eight part-time paid catechists who lead these liturgies.<sup>233</sup>

A complete analysis of St. Matia Mulumba Parish shows that each of the three priests celebrate two masses in a Sunday Mass Center making up the total of six masses in the parish. 99% of the Catholics participate in the services in the 36 sub-centers that do not have a tabernacle where the Blessed Sacrament reserved. Some, not all catechists, are installed to carry the Eucharist from the main enter to the sub-centers. This happens mainly on Christmas and Easter. So many people go spiritually hungry.

A similar pattern is in Iramba Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania where the author served for five years, most of the time as the lone priest. I celebrated two masses each Sunday, one mass at the Iramba Parish Center and one mass at one of the three subparishes or Sunday Mass centers on a rotation basis. In addition there were nine outstations where the catechist led the “Sunday Service without a Priest” in small chapels that did not have a tabernacle where the Blessed Sacrament was reserved. The catechists did not carry the Eucharist by motorcycle or bicycle from the Parish Center to the outstations. So on a given Sunday the

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<sup>233</sup> James Cutts, “Across the Continents,” 22 January 2015, *Tablet*, Tablet Website, retrieved on 24 January, 2015, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/parish-practice/6/4469/across-the-continents>

Catholics received communion in only two out of the 13 places of worship. Again many people went spiritually hungry.

In general the AMECEA Bishops do not allow the Eucharist to be reserved in outstation chapels mainly because of security issues and do not allow the catechists to give out communion because of the abuses that have taken place.

- Up to 60% of adult Catholics in Africa have not had their marriages blessed in church (sacramentalized). So one increasingly hears the expression “Eucharistic Famine” referring to the many, many Catholics in Africa who cannot receive communion because they are not officially married in the Catholic Church. A serious, ongoing pastoral challenge for SCCs is to help many of their members to regularize their marriages in a Catholic ceremony so they can receive communion.
- Practical pastoral solutions would help lay people in Africa to receive communion more frequently and thus nourish their all-important eucharistic spirituality (“the Eucharist is the source and summit of the Christian life,” Second Vatican Council, *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, No. 10 and *Catechism of the Catholic Church*), No. 1324).

With such a wide variety of bishops and their different cultural, theological and pastoral views in the national bishops’ conferences, one might ask: Is a consensus possible right now on a new pastoral solution to a pastoral issue such as the Eucharistic Famine in Africa with its two meanings? Tanzanian Bishop Renatus Nkwande of Bunda Diocese comments that the bishops themselves argue about the best pastoral solutions to this issue so consensus is very hard.<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Renatus Nkwande, conversation with the author, Maryknoll, New York, 14 May, 2015.

First let us look at a new process that is evolving that we might call “open discussion and debate leading to a deeper discernment” under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Many commentators have emphasized the fact that at the Third Extraordinary Synod in October, 2014 the bishops and cardinals publicly disagreed with one another in their attempt to discern what is good for the church. The Catholic Church really has not had this experience since the open debates of the Second Vatican Council.<sup>235</sup> The pope himself supported this open discussion and said in “Address of His Holiness Pope Francis for the Conclusion of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops”:

Personally I would be very worried and saddened if it were not for these temptations and these animated discussions; this movement of the spirits, as St Ignatius called it (*Spiritual Exercises*, 6), if all were in a state of agreement, or silent in a false and quietist peace... Many commentators, or people who talk, have imagined that they see a disputatious Church where one part is against the other, doubting even the Holy Spirit, the true promoter and guarantor of the unity and harmony of the Church... now we still have one year to mature, with true spiritual discernment, the proposed ideas and to find concrete solutions to so many difficulties and innumerable challenges that families must confront; to give answers to the many discouragements that surround and suffocate families.

Then in the “Homily of Pope Francis” at the “Closing Mass of The Extraordinary Synod on The Family and Beatification of the Servant of God Paul VI”:

In these days, during the Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, we have seen how true this is. “Synod” means “journeying together”. And indeed pastors and lay people from every part of the world have come to Rome,

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<sup>235</sup> Historians comment on the great influence and help of Catholic theologians on the bishops and documents of Vatican Two. Today there is a lot of discussion on the uneasy relationship between theologians and bishops, for example, in the USA. John Allen points out that the African theologians, especially the progressive theologians, and the African bishops seem to move on parallel tracks without too much dialogue and communications. Commentators have said that at various synods of bishops without the help of theologians the African bishops’ interventions are less theologically sound or astute.

bringing the voice of their particular Churches in order to help today's families walk the path the Gospel with their gaze fixed on Jesus. It has been a great experience in which we have lived *synodality* and *collegiality*, and felt the power of the Holy Spirit who constantly guides and renews the Church.

The goal is deeper pastoral and theological discernment leading to new pastoral solutions. This is an on-going process of listening, discussion,<sup>236</sup> dialogue, debate, discernment and proposed pastoral responses. Open discussion, debate and even disagreement may be new for African bishops, but it can be creative. It is the spirit, process and practice of synodality and collegiality under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Let us review the ongoing discussion and discernment regarding:

- **Pastoral Solution to the First Meaning of the Eucharistic Famine:  
Ordination of Married Community Elders.**

Providing the Eucharist to all Catholics in Africa is a great need. Malawian theologian Bishop Patrick Kalilombe, MAfr emphasizes that the Eucharist community is the heart of our Christian life. He says that if Christian communities in Africa cannot receive the Eucharist because of the lack of ordained ministers that presently in the Latin Rite are male, celibate priests, then we must rethink our church laws and pastoral practices, for example, ordain mature married men of proven leadership skills (*viri probati* in Latin). Then many more people would be able to receive communion and our SCCs would truly be Eucharistic Communities.

In another part of the Global South Bishop Erwin Krautler, bishop of Xingu (pronounced Shin-goo) Diocese, Brazil has argued that the pastoral situation calls for

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<sup>236</sup> See the creativity of St. Paul Inside the Walls in Madison New Jersey, USA's Young Adult Fireside Chat: Open discussion for young adults that welcomes opposing viewpoints on the great moral issues of our day.

drastic measures. In April, 2014 he took his case to the Vatican where he met with Pope Francis. Recently, Krautler and Cardinal Claudio Hummes, a friend of Pope Francis, presented the idea of ordaining married community elders to Brazil's National Conference of Bishops that is now in the process of forming a commission to delve deeper into the matter. Krautler said that he counted himself among a group of bishops, mostly in the Global South, who see the ordination of such elders as a potential solution for the countless rural congregations that cannot receive the sacraments, including Holy Communion, marriage and baptism. Krautler said that Pope Francis has encouraged open dialogue on the issue and urged bishops at the national level to come up with "courageous" proposals to address the priest shortage.<sup>237</sup>

An Editorial in *Tablet* points out: "Pope Francis has indicated that he is prepared to lift the obligation of celibacy for candidates for the priesthood in response to a plea from an individual diocesan bishop or from a bishops' conference."<sup>238</sup>

The retired German Fidei Donum Bishop Fritz Lobinger of Aliwal Diocese, South Africa has written extensively on topics such as *Teams of Elders: Moving Beyond "Viri Probati"* (Claretian Publications, 2007) and *Every Community Its Own Ordained Leaders* (Claretian Publications, Philippines, 2008). He puts forward the case for ordaining married men in underserved areas. In commenting on the World Church, and particularly the Global South, Lobinger states: "The priestless communities of the South

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<sup>237</sup> Summary of Benjamin Soloway, "Brazilian Bishop Urges Ordination of Married Community Elders," *Religious News Service*, 24 November, 2014, Reprinted in *Washington Post* [http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/brazilian-bishop-urges-ordination-of-married-community-elders-as-priest-shortage-grows/2014/11/24/1e657fb8-7412-11e4-95a8-fe0b46e8751a\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/brazilian-bishop-urges-ordination-of-married-community-elders-as-priest-shortage-grows/2014/11/24/1e657fb8-7412-11e4-95a8-fe0b46e8751a_story.html) and *Huffington Post* [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/25/brazilian-bishop-ordain-married-elders\\_n\\_6215286.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/11/25/brazilian-bishop-ordain-married-elders_n_6215286.html)

<sup>238</sup> "England Can Break New Ground," *Tablet*, 13 November 2014, retrieved from the Tablet Website, 20 November, 2104, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/editors-desk/1/3879/england-can-break-new-ground>

have already developed a ministry structure of their own. We just have to build on it.”<sup>239</sup>

“Lay leaders preach, conduct services, conduct funerals, pray for the sick and in some areas they are even authorized to conduct baptisms and marriages. There can be no doubt that they would also be accepted if they were ordained to the ministerial priesthood.”<sup>240</sup>

A key for Lobinger is that the ordination of elders would work in vibrant, self-reliant Catholic communities in Africa such as the networks of parish-based SCCs. He admits that some priests view a new path to ordination without formal academic training or the celibacy requirement as a threat that could undermine the traditional priesthood. But Lobinger argues that traditionally trained priests would fit into the new system. “The new local leaders (Married Community Elders) become a leadership team and the priests become formators.”<sup>241</sup> He adds:

I hope that some Bishops Conferences will make such proposals [on married priests] during this year. I am strongly in favor of this proposal but I feel we have to go into some detail because we might otherwise make some mistakes and might cause more problems than we solve. You remember that several bishops of Africa were convinced we should ordain the existing catechists. That would have caused problems indeed. The theme needs to be discussed thoroughly.<sup>242</sup>

Lobinger comments positively on the SCCs in Eastern Africa: “The Catholic Church in Eastern Africa is firmly on the path of community building, exactly following the path on which the Early Church has put us. You have developed SCCs in your parishes in order to learn more about ways of becoming a community in Christ, as brothers and sisters. What would make my joy even greater would be to see how some of

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<sup>239</sup> Fritz Lobinger, letter to the author dated 28 September, 2013.

<sup>240</sup> Fritz Lobinger in Benjamin Soloway, “Brazilian Bishop,” p. 1.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>242</sup> Fritz Lobinger, email message to author dated 31 January, 2015.



you are developing new materials for further developing this aim of becoming a Community Church. Times are moving on and we have to move on with them.<sup>243</sup>

The retired Bishop Colin Davies of Ngong Diocese, Kenya writes:

I am going to advocate the incorporation of the Byzantine Rite into the Roman Rite which has the option of having married priests. Celibacy, a most treasured gift to the Catholic Church, has now become a block to helping to solve the problem, not only of Eucharistic Hunger but also of the Pastoral (Prophetic) Role of Christ active in the Eucharistic Ministry and in the Priesthood of the Laity. I am hoping it will be recognized and discussed as one of the “Sign of the Times” at the forthcoming Synods of Bishops. I see SCCs as seeds for the growth of Eucharistic Communities with the possibility of mature laymen becoming ordained priests!!!<sup>244</sup>

In another article Davies writes about the Eucharistic Hunger in the Catholic Church today and the urgent pastoral need for more priests to celebrate mass. He cites the diocese in Brazil that has 800 eucharistic communities but only 17 active celibate priests. He strongly advocates married priests in a section on “Some Considerations on Proposed Neighborhood Eucharistic Communities (NEC):

The Byzantine Rite Model (adapted as necessary) would not prevent the present structures to continue but would allow additional ones. It would not require changes to the call for celibate priests. There would not seem to be any theological difficulties. Each potential NEC would be required to solve its own problems, case by case, regarding choice and acceptance of a married priest and his sustainability. A solution in a particular case should be possible since it has been found in Slovakia and other countries with the Byzantine Rite. Even Pentecostal sects have thrived on their own financial self-support. It would not be the total solution to the problems resulting from lack of vocations in the Catholic Church, but it would make a big difference. It would overcome the present pessimism in many quarters.

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<sup>243</sup> Fritz Lobinger, email message to Ephigenia Gachiri, 2013.

<sup>244</sup> Colin Davies, email messages to the author, 21 April, 2014 and 22 April, 2014.

We recall that in the parable of the workers in the vineyard Christ proposed the idea of hiring workers in the vineyard, “even” at the eleventh hour (*Matthew* 20:1-16). The priority was the harvest, not financial or other considerations. These “extra workers” did the job, but why had they not been recruited? “Because no one has hired us...”

The NEC model would enable a bishop to provide priests more easily, in progressive stages, but also bring the church nearer to the people involving them fully in the mission of the church at the individual as well as the community level. In present circumstances in the [Catholic] Church in the West, the “signs of the times” point in only one direction, that is, to have to go back to the Gospel vitality such as that of the early church, where the laity, at their level, were made responsible and were fully involved in the mission of the church.<sup>245</sup> But many other African bishops differ and want to maintain the present celibate priesthood discipline.

One pastoral solution in Africa is local experimentation within a specific context.

An interesting proposal comes from England:

It is estimated that one in 10 priests in diocesan ministry in the Catholic Church in England and Wales began his priestly vocation in the Church of England. Many of them are married... Pope Francis has indicated that he is prepared to lift the obligation of celibacy for candidates for the priesthood in response to a plea from an individual diocesan bishop or from a bishops’ conference... Because of the successful arrangement regarding married former Anglicans, England is uniquely situated to pilot a modest experiment. It is not hard to imagine a bishop finding himself faced with having to close a parish church despite there being a married deacon in the parish. An application to Rome to ordain that deacon to the priesthood, if he is willing, would be by far the better outcome. Cardinal

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<sup>245</sup> Colon Davies, “A Call to Action on Eucharistic Hunger – Now! Making the Eucharist Available to all Baptized People as the Bread of Eternal Life,” Manchester, England: Unpublished Paper, 2015.

Cormac Murphy-O'Connor indicated recently that there are circumstances where he would do precisely that.<sup>246</sup>

A related pastoral solution to the Eucharistic Famine is twofold:<sup>247</sup>

1. Dramatically increase the number of Eucharistic Ministers – sisters, brothers and especially lay people. More religious sisters and brothers could easily make this part of their pastoral ministry. Catechists receive the Order of Eucharistic Minister at the end of catechist school. But other part-time catechists could be installed as Eucharistic Ministers after specialized training. Other lay people – men and women – such as teachers, professional people, parish, sub-parish and outstation leaders, etc. could be trained and installed as well. They could assist the priests in large parishes on Sundays as well as give out the Eucharist at “Sunday Services with a Priest.” They could bring the Eucharist to sick people in their homes on a regular basis.
2. Build strong, secure churches in the sub-parishes or Mass Centers. Have the Blessed Sacrament reserved in these churches. Then the Eucharist could be given out at all services. Have a designated area of the church, or even a secure side chapel (separate or connected) as an Adoration Chapel. Challenge the local lay leaders that they are responsible for the security and upkeep of “their” church.

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<sup>246</sup> Editorial: Married Priests: “England Can Break New Ground,” *Tablet*, Vol. 268, No. 905 (15 November, 2014), p. 2, retrieved on the Tablet Website on 28 November, 2014, <http://www.thetablet.co.uk/editors-desk/1/3879/england-can-break-new-ground>

<sup>247</sup> This solution was developed during discussions in a SCCs Workshop in Tororo, Uganda in May, 2015. This could solve the problem of some Catholics in distant rural areas in Uganda (and other African countries) only receiving the Eucharist twice a year.

- **Pastoral Solution to the Second Meaning of the Eucharistic Famine: African Stages of Marriage.**

One intriguing proposal in Africa for many years is to develop an inculturated Rite for the Catechumenate of Christian Marriage (Marriage Catechumenate) similar to the Rite for the Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA or the adult catechumenate). This could be two years or more depending on the customs and traditions (cultural dimension) of the local ethnic groups in Africa. It would integrate the basic elements of consent in the traditional African marriage rituals into the Christian sacrament of marriage.

This would follow the stages of marriage<sup>248</sup> in an African context (also called “marriage in stages”) where marriage is a process rather than a single event and marriage is between two families rather than just between two individuals. The Catholic sacramental and spiritual “moments” (not “moment”) would take place during different stages of the marriage process: from the first official meeting and agreement of the two families of the couple to the betrothal (engagement) to the living together to paying of the dowry or bridewealth (that often takes place slowly over many years)<sup>249</sup> to the wife’s pregnancy to the birth of the first child<sup>250</sup> to the civil marriage to the Catholic Marriage Rite (that could be in a Catholic Church or in a SCC) to the wedding celebration.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> In an interview with the author in Washington DC on 9 October, 2014 Orsy mentioned that in the history of the Catholic Church the German tribes had this “gradual” approach to the sacrament of marriage. It was confirmed after the couple lived together successfully for six months.

<sup>249</sup> This important ritual is not well understood by Westerners. In some African ethnic groups the dowry or bridewealth payment lasts a lifetime. The groom is required to pay a major portion of it before being allowed to marry the bride. The balance is paid in portions throughout the couple’s lifetime to ensure that there is a continued relationship between the two families.

<sup>250</sup> Here is an interesting parallel: “New Catholics who enter the church at the Easter Vigil continue to meet with their group of sponsors and teachers for months after their initiation through a process called *mystagogia*. They are reminded that the parish community still supports them and that the Easter Vigil was not a graduation ceremony from a program, but the start of something new. In a recent email, my friend Isaac posed a question: What might a mystagogical approach to marriage prep look like? Could parishes invite mentor couples to check in on newlyweds at the three-month, six-month, one-year mark?”

The couple usually live together during most of this process -- what is commonly called premarital cohabitation. During this period, sometimes called the “trial marriage” or “the test of compatibility” period, the couple test their ability to live together and to get along with their in-laws such as the wife getting along with her mother-in-law if it is a patrilineal society. In African ethnic groups it is essential for the couple to have successful genital intercourse and for the wife to be fertile. If she is barren (as well as not having children) the marriage can break up. More recently if the wife does not get pregnant the man can also be tested because there are various reasons for male infertility (male's inability to cause pregnancy in a fertile female).

An important dimension is the Ministry of Pastoral Accompaniment that is emphasized in the documents of the two World Synods of Bishops (2014-2015) on “Family and Marriage.” SCC members accompany the engaged couple throughout the stages of marriage. A representative of the Catholic Church such as a priest or catechist is present at the important ceremonies and accompanies the couple in the key moments. For example, in a wedding of a couple of the Sukuma Ethnic Group in Tanzania the most important cultural ceremony is when the father of the groom hands over the

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Could parishes gather groups of couples for faith sharing, community service activities, and social events, with babysitting provided as necessary? Surely, many parishes are already doing these and other things to support married couples. But it would be so valuable for the synod to encourage church leaders to facilitate opportunities for newly married adults beyond traditional marriage and baptism preparation.” Mike Jordon Laskey, “Three Things I'd Tell the Synod on the Family About Marriage,” National Catholic Reporter Website, retrieved on 16 October, 2014, <http://ncronline.org/blogs/young-voices/three-things-id-tell-synod-family-about-marriage>

<sup>251</sup> I asked a devout Catholic married woman in Iramba Parish in Musoma Diocese, Tanzania what was the happiest day of her life. She answered: “Not the day of my marriage or the day of the birth of my first child. It was the day my first born son was circumcised.” For her this symbolized that her son had passed to manhood and the continuance of the family lineage was assured. As a mother she had successfully done her part.

dowry/bridewealth of cows to the father of the bride. This is a large, joyous event of the two families and the local community that includes the elders making a careful inspection of the cows themselves and a festive meal with plenty of food and local beer. In Bunda Parish in Bunda Diocese the parish priest participates in this celebration and gives a blessing.<sup>252</sup> Magesa goes even further in suggesting that the cultural ceremony of the cows should be combined/integrated with the Catholic Church marriage ceremony.<sup>253</sup>

A number of African bishops have pointed out how hard it is to achieve a consensus on marriage rites given the wide variety of African cultural traditions, customs and rites. In an interview with the author, retired Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana'a Nzeki of Nairobi, Kenya mentioned that the 1994 First African Synod appointed him to a Commission on Marriage in an African Context. He said that our Catholic marriage laws are based on Western law (for example, German law). The hope was to develop common inculturated guidelines on marriage that could be used throughout Africa. But the commission failed and was disbanded. Ndingi said that he could not even get the bishops in Kenya to agree on a common marriage rite for the whole country. Presently in Kenya there are 26 Catholic Dioceses and 42 to 70 ethnic groups (depending on how you count), each with its African traditional marriage customs and rites.<sup>254</sup>

Today in Africa there are many John Paul II and Benedict-appointed bishops with their more orthodox, traditional, cautious style. Now Francis-appointed bishops are emerging who have simpler lifestyles and are closer to the people. An example of this diversity is the Catholic Bishops' Conference in South Africa. Following the process of

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<sup>252</sup> Based on several conversations with Bill Vos in 2013 and 2014.

<sup>253</sup> Laurenti Magesa in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya on 14 March, 2007.

<sup>254</sup> Raphael Ndingi in a conversation with the author in Nairobi, Kenya in March, 2007.

subsidiarity (decentralization) and collegiality, a big question is how a consensus on new pastoral solutions can evolve on the local level in Africa on the challenges regarding family and marriage?

#### **14. Conclusion: Where Do We Go From Here?**

In summary what is the way forward? Where do we go from here? How is the Catholic Church in Eastern Africa preparing for the October, 2015 XIV Ordinary General Assembly on the "The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World." How can Eastern Africa SCCs participate in these practical, pastoral recommendations of AMECEA:

1. Promote the active ministry of the various Commissions/Committees for Marriage and the Family Life Apostolate including the Family Life Desk on the diocesan and national levels in Eastern Africa.
2. Help those looking forward to having their marriages blessed to come to the parish office with their parents, godparents and the chairpersons of their Small Christian Communities to begin a period of catechesis to prepare them to actively participate in the Catholic Church and understand their faith.
3. Lengthen the pre-marital catechesis. Have it focus not just on the wedding ceremony itself, but on the whole Christian life.
4. Lengthen the post-marital catechesis. Create occasions for those who have wedded during the course of the year to meet for an event and share their experiences.
5. Offer more counselling services that help married couples pull through periods of crisis.
6. Provide priest chaplains in the various Christian Family Movements.

7. Promotion Holy Childhood programs at various levels to bring the family together and to appreciate the role of parents in educating children on prayer and giving witness to their faith.
8. Organize celebrations of special masses for Christian families.
9. Bring the administrative process in nullifying marriages to the local level. The National Episcopal Conferences should come up with Judicial Procedures suitable for the local context and the Local Ordinary (Diocesan Bishop) should create a process so that the Marriage Tribunal study the specific cases and submit them to the National Episcopal Conferences for final judgment.<sup>255</sup>

Responding to the call of Pope Francis and the recommendations of the 2014 Third Extraordinary Synod of Bishops, we are challenged to continue to explore how SCC members and others can accompany families and couples who are wounded. This is the Ministry of Compassionate Accompaniment. This part of the imperative for all Catholics to go to the margins of society to serve the poor, migrants and those without hope. Pope Francis also emphasizes the importance of welcoming, listening to and accompanying young people today.

After the October, 2015 Synod of Bishops itself there will be an ongoing process involving collegiality and subsidiarity. There will be follow-up meetings and various commissions related to pastoral solutions to the challenges of family and marriage. Ongoing discussion and decision-making will take place on the local level through national episcopal conferences. Pope Francis is expected to issue a *Post-Synodal*

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<sup>255</sup> Based on the recommendations of AMECEA Pastoral Department, *AMECEA Contribution to the III Extraordinary Synod of Bishops on Pastoral Challenges to the Family in the Context of Evangelization*, Nairobi: Privately Printed, 2014.



*Apostolic Exhortation* with an ongoing plan of action that includes concrete pastoral solutions. SCCs help to promote this family and marriage ministry.

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### **Internet Resources**

African Proverbs, Sayings and Stories Website including the “African Stories Database” and “Facebook Page”  
<http://www.afriprov.org>

AMECEA Website (including the *AMECEA Online Newsletter*)  
<http://www.amecea.org>

Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (CJPC) Website -- Kenya

<http://www.cjpckkenya.org>

Small Christian Communities Global Collaborative Website and “Facebook Page”

[www.smallchristiancommunities.org](http://www.smallchristiancommunities.org)

Vatican Website

[www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)

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**THE IMAGE OF THE FAMILY IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S  
*PURPLE HIBISCUS* AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR FAMILIES IN TODAY'S  
AFRICA**

**Adolphus Ekedimma Amaefule**

**Abstract**

The family has always been regarded as the bedrock of the society and the well-being of the society as a whole is often seen to hinge on the well-being of the families that make it up. In Africa, the family is always cherished, always held in high esteem. This paper takes a look at the image of the African family presented in the multi-dimensional novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, by the Nigerian author, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. It then considers the implications and lessons that such an image holds for families in Africa today and how far the same image goes in presenting the African family as an "Ecclesia domestica".

**Introduction**

While it was in the Declaration of the Pan African Conference of Third World Theologians that the observation was made that, "in drama, novels and poetry Africans demonstrate the importance of the contextual expressions of theology"<sup>256</sup>, writing about African novels in particular, Shorter would place the following on the table: "The novel has always been one of the most important vehicles of ideas and values in a literate society, and there is evidence that the African novel is making an impact on the African elite. Its importance to the Christian educator and theologian cannot be emphasized too strongly, for the following reasons: African novels reveal what attitudes are being taken by thinking Africans towards the old and new social orders and to the process of social change; African novels reveal the depth of certain human problems and social situations;

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<sup>256</sup> Pan-African Conference of the Third World Theologians, "Declaration", Accra, Ghana, December 17-23, 1977, in *African Theology: The Contribution of the Pioneers (vol. II)*, eds. Benezet Bujo and Juvenal Ilunga Muya (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008), 264-271, 270.

African novels point to the new values emerging in contemporary society<sup>257</sup>. Indeed, one of the African novels that has not only impacted on the African elite, the Christian educator and theologian, but has also provided an important vehicle whereby ideas and values of the family in Africa today could be accessed is *Purple Hibiscus*. Published in 2003 by the Nigerian Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and set in Enugu and the University town of Nsukka, it has gone ahead to garner many awards among which is the 2005 Commonwealth Writers' Prize.

It will be our aim in this paper to have a closer look at the image of the family presented in the novel, the implications such holds for contemporary African families and how far the image goes in presenting the family in Africa, of course, the Christian family, as what the Church calls "ecclesia domestica"<sup>258</sup>, the domestic church, in which "the mystery of the Church of Christ is mirrored and given new life"<sup>259</sup>.

### **The Image of the Family in *Purple Hibiscus*: What Manner of Image?**

Indeed, the image of the family that we have here is captured by two families: the family of Kambili Achike, and then, the family of her father's sister, Auntie Ifeoma. This Kambili, a fifteen-year-old girl, is the protagonist of the novel through whose eyes events in the novel are narrated.

#### **Kambili's Family**

Writing in his aforementioned Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II had observed, thus: "As experience teaches, the absence of a father causes

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<sup>257</sup> Aylward Shorter, *African Culture and the Christian Church* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1973), 117.

<sup>258</sup> Cf. Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution, *Lumen Gentium* (21 November, 1964), 11; Vatican Council II, Decree, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (18 November, 1965), 11; John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (Rome, 22 November, 1982), 21, 49, 59, 61; John Paul II, Letter, *Gratissimam Sane* (Rome, 2 February, 1994), 3, 16, 19.

<sup>259</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 86.

psychological and moral imbalance and notable difficulties in family relationships, as does, in contrary circumstances, the oppressive presence of a father, especially where there still prevails the phenomenon of ‘machismo’, or a wrong superiority of male prerogatives which humiliates women and inhibits the development of healthy family relationships”<sup>260</sup>. In Kambili’s family, what we have is never the “absence of a father” but instead the presence, the “oppressive presence of a father” undergirded, as it were, by a fanatical brand of Catholicism. But where there is oppression, there is always no space to breathe, to breathe the air of freedom. Earlier on in the novel, Kambili had said something that captures the situation of things in her family, comprising her father, Papa (Eugene Achike), mother, Mama (Beatrice Achike) and brother, Jaja (Chukwuka Achike). According to her, “Although our spacious dining room gave way to an even wider living room, I felt suffocated”<sup>261</sup>.

That suffocation, that lack of freedom and opportunity to take initiatives spearheaded by her father, Papa, could be seen in the many aspects of the family’s life. It could be seen, for one, in the schedule that the father had drawn for the duo of Kambili and Jaja for practically everything in life: washing of school uniforms to which is allocated half hour(cf. 19), visiting of their grandfather, Papa Nnukwu, to which is usually allocated not more than fifteen minutes(cf. 61) – just as there were times allocated to eating, praying, sleeping, etc. In fact, as Kambili tells us:

*Kambili* was written in bold letters on top of the white sheet of paper, just as *Jaja* was written on the schedule above Jaja’s desk in his room. I wondered when Papa would draw up a schedule for the baby, my new brother, if he would do it right after the baby was born or wait until he was a toddler. Papa liked order. It

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<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>261</sup> Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, *Purple Hibiscus* (Lagos: Farafina, 2004), 7. Henceforth, all citations from this book are to be documented by page number within the text.

showed even in the schedules themselves, the way his meticulously drawn lines, in black ink, cut across each day, separating study from siesta, siesta from family time, family time from eating, eating from prayer, prayer from sleep. He revised them often (23).

And it also shows in his having to monitor whether in church they were singing or not, especially on one occasion when a young priest that broke into an Igbo song during his sermon visited their parish of St. Agnes, Enugu. “He [Papa]”, Kambili tells us, “looked sideways to see if Jaja and I were singing and nodded approvingly when he saw our sealed lips”(28). But, above all, the suffocation being talked about here is one that never tolerated a “no” to what was asked. A case that would always come to mind is what happened when the family went to visit Father Benedict after mass as they were in the habit of doing. Mama had asked to stay behind since she was not feeling fine. And Kambili would place the following on our table: “‘Let me stay in the car and wait, *biko*’, Mama said, leaning against the Mercedes. ‘I feel vomit in my throat.’ Papa turned to stare at her. I held my breath. It seemed a long moment, but it might have been only seconds. ‘Are you sure you want to stay in the car?’ Papa asked. Mama was looking down[...]. ‘My body does not feel right’, she mumbled. ‘I asked if you were sure you wanted to stay in the car?’ Mama looked up. ‘I’ll come with you. It’s really not that bad’”(29).

However, as the same John Paul II had pointed out above, where the phenomenon of “machismo” or a wrong superiority of male prerogatives which humiliates women prevails there is usually the inhibition of “the development of healthy family relationships”. And here, there is no exception. Lack of healthy family relationships soon gave way to violence, domestic violence. Already at the beginning of the novel we are told by Kambili of how things started to fall apart at their home (cf. 3) just after they



returned from church when her brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and how her father had flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the etagere (cf.3; 7). And if it was the figurines that were broken at this instance, it would be Kambili who would next be slapped on both the left and right cheeks at the same time with the father's huge palms leaving parallel marks on her face and ringing in her ears for days all because she had kept their driver, Kevin, waiting after school (cf. 51). There is also what happened when the same Kambili broke the Eucharist fast because of cramps occasioned by her period and she tells us what followed: "He[Papa] unbuckled his belt slowly. It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm[...]. I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back[...]. Papa was like a Fulani nomad – although he did not have their spare, tall body- as he swung his belt at Mama, Jaja and me, muttering that the devil would not win"(102).

Again, we are told of not only how he flogged Jaja when he was ten until he lost his little finger just because he had missed two questions on his catechism test and was not named the best in his First Holy Communion class (cf.145), but also of how he broke the rib of Kambili and, indeed, had her beaten until she "slipped away into quiet" (211) when she brought into their house the painting of Papa-Nnukwu and had the guts to gather the pieces after her father had torn it to shreds (cf. 209-212). And in all, there is the story of how he did beat her wife, Mama, until she lost her pregnancy. As Kambili tells us,

Mama looked around the room. She stared at the wall clock for a while, the one with the broken second hand, before she turned to me. 'You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, *nne?* Your father broke it on my belly' She sounded as if she were talking about someone else, as if the table were not made of sturdy wood. 'My blood finished on that floor even before he took

me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it' [...]. 'To save it?' Aunty Ifeoma whispered. 'What do you mean?' 'I was six weeks gone'. 'Ekwuzina! Don't say that again!' Aunty Ifeoma's eyes widened' (248-249).

But then, it was Arias who had made the following confession: "I am free when I accept the freedom of others"<sup>262</sup> - the converse of which is also true: "I am not free when I do not accept the freedom of others". Because Papa never accepted the freedom of the members of his own family, it could be said as well that he himself was never free. And indeed, he was not free. He was held captive, as we said above, by a fanatical brand of Catholicism. Yes, telling us about her father, Kambili had observed: "It was the way Papa shook his head when he talked about liking sin, as if something weighed him down, something he could not throw off"(102). Indeed, Papa's fanaticism appeared like something that weighed him down, something he could not throw off. In fact, while it was Augustine who had urged fathers as heads of households, thus: "Take my place in your families. Everyone who is head of a house must exercise the episcopal office and see to the faith of his people[...]Take care with all watchfulness for the salvation of the members of the household entrusted to you"<sup>263</sup>, what we are saying here is that it was this lack of freedom that never gave him enough space to breathe "rationally" in some of the things he did as he carried out the aforementioned "episcopal office".

It is this, for instance, that could account for why even when he was engaged in what ordinarily should have been a good and worthwhile course, he would soon allow it to "go overboard", he would soon submit such to an "overkill". The case of the prayers he said before and after meals - something good, which, however, he would do at one instance

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<sup>262</sup>Cf. John Okwoeze Odey, *The Paradox of a Nation* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2004), 6.

<sup>263</sup> Augustine, *Sermo 94*, in Bernard Haring, *The Christian Family as a Community for Salvation*, in *Man Before God: Toward a Theology of Man. Readings in Theology*, eds. Juan Alfaro and Denis Burkhard (New York: P. J. Kennedy & Sons, 1966), 146-158, 154.

for more than twenty minutes to the point that his sister, Ifeoma, had to mutter: “Did you want the rice to get cold, Eugene?”(96), cannot be forgotten. Again, earlier than now, we have recounted what happened when Mama, not feeling well, had wanted to stay back in the car and not to follow the family in their normal ritual of greeting their parish priest, Father Benedict, after mass (cf.29) and in the grace during lunch that afternoon, we are told that, “He[Papa] had prayed for the food first, then he asked God to forgive those who had tried to thwart His will, who had put selfish desires first and had not wanted to visit His servant after Mass” (32).

And when Mama would eventually lose the pregnancy by “accident” – something that was actually caused by him - he still had the audacity to ask the family to pray for the woman’s forgiveness. As Kambili tells us: “Later, at dinner, Papa said we would recite sixteen different novenas. For Mama’s forgiveness. And on Sunday, the first Sunday of Trinity, we stayed back after Mass and started the novenas” (35-36). Similarly, it made him see evil even where there was none. An instance could be seen in what the same Kambili made us understand transpired when the family had visited the Igwe of their town some years back. “Mama”, Kambili had begun, “had greeted him[the Igwe] the traditional way that women were supposed to, bending low and offering him her back so that he would pat it with his fan made of the soft, straw-colored tail of an animal. Back home that night, Papa told Mama that it was sinful. You did not bow to another human being. It was an ungodly tradition, bowing to an Igwe” (93). And it was the same thing that made him burn the feet of both Kambili and Jaja for seeing sin and walking right into it. And the sin in question here is their inability to have informed him, Papa, of the fact that their grandfather, Papa-Nnukwu, whom he never failed to call a “pagan” and

“heathen” would be sleeping in the same house with them when they were on a little vacation at Aunty Ifeoma’s place at Nsukka (193-195).

Of course, he never greeted the old man, Papa-Nnukwu, that is, never visited him nor did he permit the old man to visit him either, but only sent him slim wads of naira through their driver, Kevin, or through any of their Umunna members, slimmer wads, we are told, than he gave Kevin as a Christmas bonus. “Papa-Nnukwu had never set feet in it[Kambili’s house], because when Papa had decreed that heathens were not allowed in his compound, he had not made an exception for his father” (62-63). And the old man would often wonder as he did while being driven past Kambili’s house in Aunty Ifeoma’s car as they went on sightseeing during the Christmas period: “*Nekenem*, look at me. My son owns that house that can fit in every man in Abba, and yet many times I have nothing to put on my plate. I should not have let him follow those missionaries” (83).

Indeed, when Ingersoll would point out that, “When a man really believes that it is necessary to do a certain thing to be happy for ever, or that a certain belief is necessary to ensure eternal joy, there is in that man no spirit of concession. He divides the whole world into saints and sinners, into believers and unbelievers, into God’s sheep and the devil’s goats, into people who will be glorified and people who will be damned”<sup>264</sup>, it was as if he had Papa in mind. In fact, it was his lack of freedom and the consequent fanaticism that made him, in a holier-than-thou manner and much like Achebe’s Reverend James Smith who saw things as black and white<sup>265</sup>, to divide the whole world into “saints and sinners, believers and unbelievers, God’s sheep and the devil’s goats, people who will be glorified and people who will be damned”. And while he was always

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<sup>264</sup> Robert Ingersoll, *Some Reasons Why I am a Freethinker* (Austin, Texas: American Atheist Press, 1993), 2.

<sup>265</sup> Cf. Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2008), 147.

the saint, or more precisely, the “Saint Innocent Odinkemere”, or even, Nietzsche-like, God himself, others were simply “sinners, unbelievers, devil’s goats and those who will be damned”. And it was practically this attitude that his sister, Ifeoma, was not only criticizing when she pointed out: “Eugene has to stop doing God’s job. God is big enough to do his own job. If God will judge our father for choosing to follow the way of our ancestors, then let God do the judging, not Eugene”(96), but also the same that made Kambili marvel when her father, Papa, had told her that he once committed a sin: “I did not know he had committed any sins, that he could commit any sins” (196).

Be that as it may, it was Newton who had told us in his third law of motion that action and reaction are equal and opposite<sup>266</sup>. The action of oppressive fatherhood with its undertones of lack of freedom and then violence, would soon breathe a reaction in the family members. First of all, it gave rise to defiance in Jaja, a defiance in search of freedom. “Jaja’s defiance”, Kambili tells us, “seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma’s experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with undertones of freedom[...]. A freedom to be, to do” (16). And in Kambili’s mother, it soon gave rise to a reaction that saw her poison the husband, Kambili’s father. “I started putting the poison in his tea”, Mama had told Kambili, “before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor” (290). But when the policemen would come to find out who was responsible, Kambili tells us: “Jaja did not wait for their questions; he told them he had used rat poison, that he put it in Papa’s tea. They allowed him to change his shirt before they took him away”(291). Thus, the family would soon be turned into a “fatherless family”, or, to fall back to John Paul II’s initial observation, it would soon become a family in which there was going to be forever the “absence of a father” .

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<sup>266</sup> Cf. Duane Knudson, *Fundamentals of Biomechanics* (New York: Springer Science, 2007), 137.

However, it would be a great disservice to balanced scholarship not to mention, even if in passing, that Papa was indeed a generous man – though it must be accepted at the same time that his generosity and magnanimity were extended more often than not to those outside his immediate family circle. It was as if he was living true to his title *Omelora*, the One who does for the community (cf.56). For instance, while making the journey to Abba for the Christmas break and had to buy one or two things from the hawkers, Kambili tells us that, “Although Papa bought only bread and okpa wrapped in hot banana leaves, he gave a twenty-naira note to each of the other hawkers” (54). He it was who refurbished the Daughters of the Immaculate Heart’s library (cf. 46), made the biggest donations to Peter’s Pence and St. Vincent de Paul, paid for the cartons of communion wine and for the new ovens at the convent where the reverend sisters baked the host and built the new wing of St. Agnes Hospital where Father Benedict gave extreme unction (cf.5). He equally paid the school fees of up to a hundred of his people (cf. 250) - even those of the children of their gateman at Abba, Haruna (cf. 103). He paid for the daughter of Ade Coker, his slain editor at the *Standard*, to see the best therapists in Nigeria and abroad after the blast that impaired her speaking and hearing (cf. 259) and during the fundraising in his hometown of Abba for the priest’s new house, he wrote a cheque which when announced by the M.C, made the priest to get up, Kambili tells us, “and started to dance, jerking his behind this way and that, and the crowd rose up and cheered so loudly it was like the rumblings of thunder at the end of rainy season”(90).

Add to the aforementioned the fact that he, Papa, that is, always, Kambili informs us, “sat in the front pew for Mass” (4), and was the first to receive the communion which he knelt to do unlike most others (cf. 4), and was also one of the oblates who distributed ash

every year on Ash Wednesday (cf.3), then one can better appreciate what Kambili helps us understand happened during Father Benedict's sermons. According to her,

During his sermons, Father Benedict usually referred to the pope, Papa, and Jesus – in that order. He used Papa to illustrate the gospels. ‘When we let our light shine before men, we are reflecting Christ’s Triumphant Entry’, he said that Palm Sunday. ‘Look at Brother Eugene. He could have chosen to be like other Big Men in the country, he could have decided to sit at home and do nothing after the coup, to make sure the government did not threaten his business. But no, he used the *Standard* [Papa’s newspaper] to speak the truth even though it meant the paper lost advertising. Brother Eugene spoke for freedom. How many of us have reflected the Triumphant Entry?’(4-5)

And it is this same man thus praised, highly educated as he was - he had actually studied in England (cf. 24) – even as Achebe had elsewhere observed that “a man may go to England, become a lawyer or a doctor, but it does not change his blood”<sup>267</sup> - that would do the things we had pointed out before now – a fact that would kind of lend credence to what I had pointed out through the character Kalu in my little play, *The Mad Priest*, thus: “true, true, big scapula no bi big virtue!”<sup>268</sup>.

### **Aunty Ifeoma’s Family**

Aunty Ifeoma is the sister of Kambili’s father, Papa, and a lecturer at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Of her, Kambili tells us: “Aunty Ifeoma was as tall as Papa, with a well-proportioned body. She walked fast, like one who knew just where she was going and what she was going to do there. And she spoke the way she walked, as if to get as many words out of her mouth as she could in the shortest time” (71). Having lost her husband, Ifediora, in a car accident - a trailer had actually rammed into his car (cf.74) – she was saddled with the responsibility of taking care of her three children: fifteen-year-old Amaka, a thinner teenage copy of her mother; Obiora who was fourteen and then, Chima

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<sup>267</sup> Chinua Achebe, *No Longer at Ease* (London: Heinemann, 1987), 146.

<sup>268</sup> Adolphus Ekedimma Amaefule, *The Mad Priest* (Ibadan: Caro’Phem Communications, 2007), 53.

who was seven. Kambili tells us that, “They all laughed alike: throaty, cackling sounds pushed out with enthusiasm” (78).

And they could so laugh, freely as they did, because theirs was a family wherein “the air was free for you to breathe as you wished”(120). Yes, an environment in which they, not feeling suffocated as Kambili in her own, were free to spread their wings and fly. But then it was Feyerabend who in his well-known book, *Against Method*, had pointed out that, “The only principle that does not inhibit progress is: anything goes”<sup>269</sup>. Indeed, even as Auntie Ifeoma did carve a space where her children could express themselves freely, what she never espoused in their training was any Feyerabendian mentality of anything goes. In fact, if giving them that freedom was a kind of “madness” what we are trying to say here - to paraphrase Shakespeare – is that there was indeed a method in the madness<sup>270</sup>, that it was not a method-less madness, or, to borrow the title of Feyerabend’s aforementioned book, it was simply not against method!

A case that comes to mind is what happened when Obiora interrupted Auntie Ifeoma’s friend, Chiaku, by telling her that what she had just said was “simply unrealistic pep-rally nonsense” (245). Kambili tells us what followed: ““Go into my room and wait for me, Obiora’, Auntie Ifeoma said. Obiora stood up and left[...]. Auntie Ifeoma apologized to her friend[...]. Her friend left soon afterwards, and Auntie Ifeoma stormed inside, nearly knocking a lamp over. I heard the thud of a slap and then her raised voice. ‘I do not quarrel with your disagreeing with my friend. I quarrel with how you have disagreed. I do not raise disrespectful children in this house, do you hear me?[...]. I will not tolerate this rubbish from you! *I na-anu?*’ She lowered her voice then. I heard the click of her

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<sup>269</sup> Paul Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: Verso, 1993), 14.

<sup>270</sup> Cf. *Hamlet*, 2.2.



bedroom door closing. ‘I always got the stick on my palm,’ Amaka said, joining me on the verandah. ‘And Obiora got his on his buttocks[...] Afterwards we would talk about it for hours. I hated that. Just give me the lashes and let me out. But no, she explained why you had been flogged, what she expected you to do not to get flogged again. That’s what she’s doing with Obiora’(245). And even before now when the same Amaka had told the mother that Kambili behaved like an *atulu* when her [Amaka’s] friends came, Aunty Ifeoma had told her: “Amaka, you are free to have your opinions, but you must treat your cousin with respect. Do you understand that? [...]. Showing respect is not calling your cousin a sheep”(142).

And though the family had not much since there were times when up to two months lecturers were not paid and even at that the same lecturers had to call off the strike they had embarked upon to press home their demands (cf.76), Aunty Ifeoma was able to share the little she had with others. One of such “others” was Mama Joe who had plaited Kambili’s hair at Ogige market. As Kambili herself tells us:

Mama Joe welcomed me as though she had been plaiting my hair all my life. If I was Aunty Ifeoma’s niece, then I was special. She wanted to know how Aunty Ifeoma was doing. ‘I have not seen that good woman in almost a month. I would be naked but for your Aunty who gives me her old clothes. I know she doesn’t have that much, either. Trying so hard to raise those children well. *Kpau!* A strong woman,’ Mama Joe said (236-237).

There was also her father, Papa-Nnukwu, whom she took care of from the same salary as Papa-Nnukwu himself had confirmed to both Kambili and Jaja as they went visiting him: “My legs ache often. Your Aunty Ifeoma brings me medicine when she can put the money together”(65). And it would be as a result of the fact that Kambili’s father, Papa, had barred the old man, as we pointed out before now, from coming to his house that she and Papa would quarrel, would stop speaking to each other, and only resumed

after a few years had passed (cf. 65). Once, this same Papa-Nnukwu had jokingly told her, Auntie Ifeoma, that is, - the latter who was trying to convince him that it was not the missionaries who had made Eugene behave the way he did since she herself went to a missionary school, too - that being a woman she did not count. “But you are a woman. You do not count”, he had said, to which Auntie Ifeoma had responded: “Eh? So I don’t count? Has Eugene ever asked about your aching leg? If I do not count, then I will stop asking if you rose well in the morning” (83). Indeed, it appears in a way that in the novel Auntie Ifeoma was out to prove in all she did - much like Achebe’s character Beatrice in his *Anthills of the Savannah* whose Igbo name is Nwanyibuife, A female is also something<sup>271</sup> - that, indeed, a woman is something, that a woman did count, that a woman counts.

And helped by that fearlessness of hers (cf. 76, 89) – Kambili had actually qualified her as “tall, exuberant, fearless, loud, larger than life”(95) - she was able to allow that intention not only to bear on her outspokenness which would, however, lead to the termination of her appointment at the university on the pretext that she was disloyal to the university (cf. 222-223; 261), but also on the things she did. For one, it made her, even in the midst of her scarcity, not to do any type of thing in order to be in plenty. Discussing with Mama, Kambili’s mother, whom she normally called *nwunye m*, about how things were tough and how outrageous it was buying even a cooking-gas and with Mama telling her to inform her brother, Eugene, since there were gas cylinders in the factory, Kambili tells us, thus: “Auntie Ifeoma laughed, patted Mama’s shoulder fondly. ‘*Nwunye m*, things are tough, but we are not dying yet. I tell you all these things because it is you. With someone else, I would rub Vaseline on my hungry face until it shone”(76-77). And

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<sup>271</sup> Cf. Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1999), 87.

continuing, she would tell the same Mama: “Have you forgotten that Eugene offered to buy me a car, even before Ifediora died? But first he wanted us to join the Knights of St. John. He wanted us to send Amaka to convent school. He even wanted me to stop wearing makeup! I want a new car, *nwunye m*, and I want to use my gas cooker again and I want a new freezer and I want money so that I will not have to unravel the seams of Chima’s trousers when he outgrows them. But I will not ask my brother to bend over so that I can lick his buttocks to get these things” (95).

Be that as it may, another thing about Aunty Ifeoma’s family is that it was a family that prayed even as the family’s mode of praying was different from that of Kambili’s. For one, as Aunty Ifeoma would tell Kambili who was at table with her family when she, alongside Jaja, visited Nsukka - and a visit that Kambili had confessed changed them all, even Papa and things were destined not to be the same, to be in their original order (cf. 209)-: “We do not say Mass in the name of grace like your father does”(119). Again, morning and night prayers were always peppered with songs, Igbo praise songs that usually called for hand clapping (cf.140) unlike the case at Kambili’s family for which Jaja would admit: “We don’t sing at home”(125). While the aforementioned night prayers would consist in saying the rosary after which one could stay up as long as one would want afterward to watch TV or do whatever else (cf. 124), about the morning prayers, Kambili tells us, thus:

[W]e said morning prayers in the living room, a string of short prayers punctuated by songs. Aunty Ifeoma prayed for the university, for the lecturers and administration, for Nigeria, and finally she prayed that we might find peace and laughter today. As we made the sign of the cross, I looked up to seek out Jaja’s face, to see if he, too, was bewildered that Aunty Ifeoma and her family prayed for, of all things, *laughter* (126-127).

### Lessons and Implications for Families in Africa Today

Fischer had once observed that, “Images and symbols shape experience on levels deeper than explanations”<sup>272</sup>. And believing that we have succeeded in painting the image of the family in this novel, let us move a step further and pinpoint how and in what manner the image can help shape for the better the experience of many a family in Africa today:

**a. The Value of Responsible Freedom:** One of the things or lessons that could be gleaned from what we have presented above is the difference that freedom, yes, responsible freedom, could make in the life of a family. While this freedom is seen in the family of Aunty Ifeoma and not in that of Kambili, it is something that helps in the growth, maturity and creativity of children. Children grow better where and when watched by their parents, they are allowed to spread their wings and fly. The children of Aunty Ifeoma at their age could take initiatives and think for themselves while Jaja and Kambili could not. Indeed, Kambili’s candid confession when Amaka had asked Jaja to put on the stereo seems to buttress what we are saying, here: “‘That’s a stereo, isn’t it? Why don’t you play some music? Or are you bored with the stereo, too?’ Amaka asked, her placid eyes darting from Jaja to me. ‘Yes, it’s stereo’, Jaja said. He did not say that we never played it, we never even thought to, that all we listened to was the news on Papa’s radio during family time” (92). Again, it could be seen in what Kambili told us when Aunty Ifeoma had suggested that she and Amaka would stay together at Bello Hall at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. “I nodded stiffly”, she had begun, “although Aunty Ifeoma could not see me. I had never thought about the university, where I would go or what I would study. When the time came, Papa would decide” (130).

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<sup>272</sup> Kathleen R. Fisher, *The Inner Rainbow: The Imagination in Christian Life* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1983), 111.

In fact, when Amaka, telling her mother about Kambili, had said: “She[Kambili] behaves funny. Even Jaja is strange. Something is not right with them”(142), she was actually making a statement of fact. But what was actually not right with them, Kambili and Jaja, that is, is that they never enjoyed the kind of “free” environment that was Amaka’s in her own family. They were simply victims of what Miller had called “poisonous pedagogy”<sup>273</sup>. Hence, Varkey maintains that “No child becomes what he or she is by accident. The influence of parents and of other significant adults in the life of the child is of capital importance”<sup>274</sup>. And where there is this poisonous pedagogy and ipso facto no freedom, fear usually takes over. Kambili had once actually said something along this line. “I was familiar with fear”, she had commenced, “yet each time I felt it, it was never the same as the other times, as though it came in different flavours and colours” (196). And the presence of this fear, a fear that ate into self-confidence, would be felt in Kambili’s other honest confession: “It was what Aunty Ifeoma did to my cousins [...] setting higher and higher jumps for them in the way she talked to them, in what she expected of them. She did it all the time believing they would scale the rod. And they did. It was different for Jaja and me. We did not scale the rod because we believed we could, we scaled it because we were terrified that we couldn’t”(226).

**b. The True Image of Happiness:** Augustine it was who had observed that, “We all certainly desire to live happily”<sup>275</sup> and that is because it is a natural condition of human beings to be happy<sup>276</sup>. And to live this happily in any family - and that is another thing that becomes glaring from this book - does not depend, as a matter of fact, on how much

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<sup>273</sup> Cf. Alice Miller cited in C.P. Varkey, *Handle with Care: You Can Make or Break your Child* (Mumbai: Better Yourself Books, 2003), 46.

<sup>274</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>275</sup> Augustine, *Of the Morals of the Catholic Church*, 3.4.

<sup>276</sup> Cf. John Powell, *Happiness is an Inside Job* (Allen Texas: Tabor Publishing, 1989), 1.

that family has but on how it has what it has. And this is something that should be understood by many a family in Africa today. The Book of Proverbs already tells us that it is “Better to have vegetables where there is love than to have a fattened ox with nothing but hatred” (Prov. 15:17). The family of Kambili lives in luxury but at the same time in lack of peace and happiness. But Auntie Ifeoma’s family even in the midst of its comparative poverty - Kambili, for instance, observes that at Auntie Ifeoma’s house “Food had little meat, each person’s piece the width of two fingers pressed close together and the length of half a finger”(140) - radiated love and peace. Kambili acknowledges that Auntie Ifeoma “seemed so happy, so at peace”(174). Yes, while Smith had told us that “African laughter itself is not only a celebration of life, but also a weapon of defense against tears”<sup>277</sup>, and while ipso facto laughter may not be the only index of happiness, suffice it to be so at this moment. Hence, Kambili’s observation that, “Laughter always rang out in Auntie Ifeoma’s house and no matter where the laughter came from, it bounced around all the walls, all the rooms”(140) speaks volume of what we are up to, here.

And while this is little surprising for a family that actually did pray, as we pointed out above, for laughter (cf. 126-127), more surprising is the fact that Kambili who had wanted to tell Father Amadi that she was sorry that she did not smile or laugh (cf. 139), would not only dream of laughing - “That night, I dreamed that I was laughing” (88) - but would do the laughing in actuality: “I laughed. It sounded strange as if I were listening to the recorded laughter of a stranger being played back. I was not sure I had ever heard myself laugh”(179).

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<sup>277</sup> Simon E. Smith, “Foreword”, in Jean-Marc Ela, *My Faith as an African* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), ix-xi, xi.

**c. The Significance of Religious Tolerance:** Another thing that easily crystalizes out from the book is the significance that should be placed on religious tolerance. That Kambili's father, Papa, was a religious fanatic is now obvious and it was that fanaticism of his that made it impossible for him to tolerate all others whose views, including religious views, were contrary to his. Indeed, what we are saying here appear better captured by the following from Aunty Ifeoma as she discussed with Kambili's mother, Mama, thus:

You know why Eugene did not get along with Ifediora?[...] Because Ifediora told him to his face what he felt. Ifediora was not afraid to tell the truth. But you know Eugene quarrels with the truths that he does not like. Our father is dying, do you hear me? Dying. He is an old man, how much longer does he have, *gbo*? Yet Eugene will not let him into this house, will not even greet him. *O joka!* Eugene has to stop doing God's job. God is big enough to do his own job. If God will judge our father for choosing to follow the way of our ancestors, then let God do the judging, not Eugene'. I heard the word *umunna* [...]. You know that the members of our *umunna*, in fact everybody in Abba, will tell Eugene only what he wants to hear. Do our people not have sense? Will you pinch the finger of the hand that feeds you?'(95-96).

And since the family is and remains the place where “children best learn the dispositions and skills which they require in order to grow into mature human beings capable of contributing to the common life and good of society”<sup>278</sup>, it is expected that families in Africa would help inculcate in their children and wards the reality of religious tolerance and the importance of recognizing, as Aunty Ifeoma would explain to Kambili, that, “sometimes what was different was good as what was familiar” (166). This, of course, would involve their having to acquire in the same family the ability and capacity to engage in dialogue. And thank God, “Dialogue”, says Orobator, “is a family affair. Family life facilitates dialogue because it has the singular capacity to assemble and

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<sup>278</sup> John Paul II, *Address to the New Ambassador of the New Zealand to the Holy See* (25 May, 2000), 5.

welcome members of various faiths under the same roof”<sup>279</sup>. And the dialogue we are talking about here, to go back to John Paul II, is “never an attempt to impose our own views upon others, since such dialogue would become a form of spiritual and cultural domination. This does not mean that we abandon our own convictions. What it means is that, holding firmly to what we believe, we listen respectfully to others, seeking to discern all that is good and holy, all that favours peace and cooperation”<sup>280</sup>. And the significance of this would be better appreciated if cognizance is taken of the havoc that religious intolerance and fundamentalism has wrecked on and continues to do in Africa, especially in Nigeria, where religious fundamentalism has been, so to say, a recurrent decimal in public life since the 1980s - a phenomenon which, expressing itself in religious extremism and zealotism, has sectarian groups of different kinds as its exponents and protagonists<sup>281</sup>.

**d. The Importance of Family Prayer:** Writing in his Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus*, Pope Benedict XVI had observed that, “to give prayer – individual and communal – its rightful place within the family is to respect an essential principle of the Christian vision of life: the primacy of grace”<sup>282</sup>. And it is observed also that in the novel, “prayer – individual and communal -” is given its rightful place within the two families of Kambili and Auntie Ifeoma even if the mode and manner of doing such differed. And it is something that families in Africa should not underestimate, but should always lay emphasis on if each is to remain, as it were, “the smallest articulation

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<sup>279</sup> Agbonkhianmeghe E. Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine from an African Perspective* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2008), 88.

<sup>280</sup> John Paul II, *Address During Meeting with Representatives of Other Religions and Other Christian Confessions* (New Delhi, India, Sunday, 7 November, 1999), 6.

<sup>281</sup> Cf. Simon O. Anyanwu, “Boko Haram Riot: Matters Arising”, in *Boko Haram: Religious Conflicts and Dialogue Initiatives in Nigeria, Vol.1*, eds. Simon O. Anyanwu and Isidore Nwanaju (Owerri: Edu-Edy Publications, 2010), 30-44, 34.

<sup>282</sup> Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Africae Munus* (Quidah, 19 November, 2011), 45.



of the Church and the sphere in which, in a concrete way, primary ecclesial activities such as catechesis, conversion and prayer are carried out”<sup>283</sup>. It is something that should equally be taught or inculcated into children quite early, this importance of family prayer, that is, for as Steady tells us while reflecting on the Creole women of Sierra Leone, “Reliance on prayer is learned early in childhood through the institution of family prayer”<sup>284</sup>. And the significance of the foregoing could be seen in the saying that, “the family that prays together stays together” – though that saying would immediately bring up the question of Kambili’s family and how, despite all the family prayers they said, the violence of their father, as shown above, prevailed, leading, as it were, to the eventual disintegration of the family. And the answer to the question could in a way be found in the observation of John Paul II elsewhere that, “whenever violence is done in the name of religion, we must make it clear to everyone that in such instances we are not dealing with true religion”.<sup>285</sup> And applied to the violence of Kambili’s father, it could be said as well that what held sway in the family was not actually “true religion” or, more precisely, true Catholicism, but a fanatical brand of it. But that religion, or better Catholicism, was abused even through the saying of the same family prayers does not destroy - and this must be said times without number - the use of either religion or more specifically, the use and importance of the same family prayers.

**e. The Beauty of the Extended Family System:** In the novel, Kambili had precisely told us the following:

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<sup>283</sup> Joseph C. Atkinson, *Biblical and Theological Foundations of the Family* (Washington D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 1.

<sup>284</sup> Filomina Chioma Steady, “Protestant Women’s Association in Freetown, Sierra Leone”, in *Women in Africa: Studies in Social and Economic Change*, eds. Nancy J. Hafkin and Edna G. Bay (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 213-238, 228.

<sup>285</sup> John Paul II, *Address During Meeting with Muslim Leaders* (Apostolic Nunciature, Abuja, Sunday, 22 March, 1998), 3.

‘*Nwunye m*’, Auntie Ifeoma called, and Mama turned back. The first time I heard Auntie Ifeoma call Mama “*nwunye m*” years ago, I was aghast that a woman called another woman “my wife.” When I asked, Papa said it was the remnants of ungodly traditions, the idea that it was the family and not the man alone that married a wife, and later Mama whispered, although we were alone in my room, ‘I am her wife, too, because I am your father’s wife. It shows that she accepts me’ (73)

Yes, “the idea that it was the family and not the man alone that married a wife” rather than being remnant of an ungodly tradition as Papa suggested above is actually in sync with African tradition and culture. “African marriage”, says Bujo, “does not just involve two people, but also affects the entire family and even the clan communities of both marriage partners”<sup>286</sup>. And the “family” implied here rather than being just the “nuclear family” is, in fact, the extended family system. According to Mbiti, “For the African peoples the family has a much wider circle of members than the word suggests in Europe or North America. In traditional society, the family includes children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children and other immediate relatives [...]. The family also includes the departed relatives, whom we have designated as the living dead”<sup>287</sup>. In fact, “for Africans, ‘African family’ really equals ‘extended family’”<sup>288</sup>.

And this reality of the extended family in the novel could be seen also in the issue of “*umunna*” both on the part of Kambili’s father, Papa, and Amaka’s father, Ifediora. Herein, it was the members of the *Umunna* who, we are told, had sent people to Papa urging him to have children with someone else to which he declined (cf.75) – just it was they on the side of Ifediora who, as Auntie Ifeoma tells us, had said that Ifediora had left

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<sup>286</sup> Benezet Bujo, *The Ethical Dimension of Community: The African Model and the Dialogue Between North and South* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1998), 94.

<sup>287</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Oxford: Heinemann, 1969), 104.

<sup>288</sup> Joseph Healey and Donald Sybertz, *Towards an African Narrative Theology* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 1996), 118.

money somewhere which Aunty Ifeoma had hidden - with one of the women from Ifedoir's compound even suggesting that it was Aunty Ifeoma who had killed Ifediora (cf. 74). In fact, Mama's observation that "*Umunna* will always say hurtful things" (75), seems to be in order here. But the fact remains that they can also say beautiful things and even do beautiful things. It was to them, for instance, that Papa-Nnukwu had complained that he did not know his grand-children, Kambili and Jaja, and neither did they know him and even if we are told they always sided with Papa, but at least they were able to urge Papa to let Kambili and Jaja visit him, Papa-Nnukwu, that is, to greet him "because every man who was old enough to be called grandfather deserved to be greeted by his grandchildren"(cf.61-62).

And that is another way of saying that just as no system can ever lay claim to perfection, so also the African extended family can never. In addition to what we have pointed out above, it has also, in a way, been accused of always "democratizing" mediocrity and killing softly the spirit of enterprise obtainable in a family<sup>289</sup>. But this and other abuses cannot make the beauty of the extended family system to be underestimated nor warrant a situation – and this is what actually we wish to state here - whereby its significance in the training and education of children in families in Africa today would be ignored. For one, the African extended family system at least makes it easier for children to know that the world does not begin and end only with their immediate families but that the family is larger than that – just as it makes them realize as well that the fact that each of them exists is only because the family as a whole exists and that no one can make it in

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<sup>289</sup> Cf. Luke Nnamdi Mbefo, *The Reshaping of African Traditions* (Onitsha: Spiritan Publications, 1988), 101.

life by being, to borrow from Donne, “an island, entire of itself”<sup>290</sup>. It is this reality, indeed, that Mbiti was trying to capture when he said, thus: “In traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately[...]. He is simply part of the whole[...]. The individual can only say: ‘I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am’”<sup>291</sup>.

And here, indeed, lies the beauty of the African sense of solidarity and community that ought to be praised as John Paul II once did, thus:

African cultures have an acute sense of solidarity and community life. In Africa it is unthinkable to celebrate a feast without the participation of the whole village. Indeed, community life in African societies expresses the extended family. It is my ardent hope and prayer that Africa will always preserve this priceless cultural heritage and never succumb to the temptation to individualism, which is so alien to its best traditions<sup>292</sup>.

## Conclusion

We began this piece trying to unveil the image of the family in the novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, and how far that image could equate, or better, present the family as *Ecclesia Domestica*, domestic church, which constitutes the specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion<sup>293</sup>. We had to look at the families of Auntie Ifeoma and that of her brother, Papa, Kambili’s father, and the implications the image uncovered could hold for families in Africa today. In addition to all we pointed out before now, we believe that the same image of the family unearthed could offer a huge helping hand to the Church in Africa and, invariably, her theologians, in the articulation of a more solid and authentic

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<sup>290</sup> Cf. John Donne, *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, in *The Works of John Donne*, vol. III, ed. Henry Alford (London: John W. Parker, 1839), 493-614, 575.

<sup>291</sup> Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 106.

<sup>292</sup> John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* (Yaoundé, 14 September, 1995), 43.

<sup>293</sup> John Paul II, *Familiaris Consortio*, 21.

African theology of the family. This is because in the novel, as shown above, reality is presented as it is, the reality lived, that is, by many a family in Africa today, without trying a bit to sugar-coat it. Hence, in doing this, it helps theology in general and in our case, African theology, to overcome one of the criticisms often put on its way: That in relation to what Shorter had called, at the beginning of this paper, the “depth of certain human problems and social situations”, it is usually superficial. “The dreadful thing about so much theology”, says Jenkins, “is that, in relation to the reality of the human situation, it is so superficial. Theological categories (really mere theological formulae) are ‘aimed’ without sufficient depth of understanding at life insensitively misunderstood. Theologians need to stand under the judgments of the insights of literature before they can speak with true theological force of, and to, the world this literature reflects and illuminates”<sup>294</sup>. No wonder, Rubio would caution that, “in order to avoid constructing a potentially alienating, overly idealistic theology of the family, the realities of imperfection, sin, and disunity must be brought to the forefront of theological thinking and writing”<sup>295</sup>.

And because, “The African family serves as the anthropological reference for the church-as-family”<sup>296</sup>, and the Church-as-God’s family which is, according to the Fathers of the 1994 African Synod, “the expression of the Church’s nature particularly appropriate for Africa”<sup>297</sup>, it cannot be gainsaid that it would also contribute in no small

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<sup>294</sup> David Jenkins cited in David Jasper, *The Study of Literature and Religion: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>295</sup> Julie Hanlon Rubio, *Family Ethics: Practices for Christians* (Washington, D.C: Georgetown University Press, 2010), 67.

<sup>296</sup> A.E. Orobator, *The Church as Family: African Ecclesiology in its Social Context* (Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa, 2000), 161. Elsewhere he had pointed out that, “The concept of family in Africa contains values, ideals, images, and symbols that can be effectively utilized to express the model of the Church as Family” (Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*, 85).

<sup>297</sup> John Paul II, *Ecclesia in Africa*, 63.

measure to the breadth, depth and width of the ever-widening ocean of African ecclesiology.

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## The Gospel of the Family: From Africa to the World Church

Philomena N. Mwaura

### Introduction

In a seminal article on “Reconstructing the African Family”, Laurenti Magesa aptly observes that “sociological ground work is necessary if any theological reflection on the family is to be realistic and make sense at all”<sup>298</sup>. He further notes that such ground work is often ignored resulting in detrimental consequences when a context (.e.g. marriage and family in Africa) is idealized and does not reflect the reality on the ground. There is a tendency in symposia and theological writings to extol the African family and its virtues without being cognizant of the fact that; change has been creeping in slowly in Africa as elsewhere since the 15<sup>th</sup> century, altering social structures and relations.

In this respect, Magesa further avers that the theology of the family and ecclesiology of the Church as Family of God as expounded in the 1994 African Bishop’s Synod in Rome; had inherent weaknesses for it is was not based on a proper or deep social analysis of the African context. Such an analysis would have provided the Bishops with a deeper understanding of the African family and revealed the areas of deeper evangelization and the kind of dialogue demanded by the Church in Africa today.<sup>299</sup>

Magesa’s views are still pertinent eleven years later and considering the fact that, the

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<sup>298</sup> Laurenti Magesa, “Reconstructing the African Family”, in *Marriage and Family in African Christianity*, ed. A. N. Kyomo and S. G. Selvan (Nairobi: Acton Publishers. 2004), 9.

<sup>299</sup> Magesa, “Reconstructing the African Family”, 10.

Church as Family is still the prevailing ecclesiological model at the dawn of the twenty first century.

In a similar vein, Musimbi Kanyoro an African woman theologian notes that the African family being socially and culturally constructed is a site of struggle for African women and any discourse on the family requires its interrogation separating what is life affirming, especially to women and what is not<sup>300</sup>.

Whether traditional or modern, the African Family has major flaws that must sociologically and anthropologically be noted and theologically evaluated. This article argues for a comprehensive analysis of the African family from anthropological, sociological, religious, economic and theological perspectives if it has to be properly understood and if need; be appropriate interventions constructed where challenges and problems have to be addressed. So what is the African Family? How is it to be understood? This article explores the nature, structure and functions of the family in Africa, the changes that have occurred in the family structure and the factors behind those changes. It concludes with an exploration of the Catholic Church's view of the family and the markers of a Gospel of the Family within the context of the challenges that the African family finds itself in today.

### **Understanding the African Family**

The Family in Africa is a complex institution and one cannot describe it without getting into the trap of generalizations and reductionism. Nevertheless, family in Africa is the basic social unit founded on kinship, marriage and adoption and other relational aspects.

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<sup>300</sup> R.A.Musimbi Kanyoro and Nyambura J. Njoroge, eds., *Groaning in Faith: African Women in the Household of God* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1996)



The family may also be patriarchal, matrilineal, patrilineal, multilocal, multigenerational, multiethnic and multi-religious owing to migration, marriage and conversion. It is also marked by tensions between African cultural values, Christian teachings, secularism and other ideologies and religions. The family is a unit of production<sup>301</sup>, consumption, reproduction and accumulation. In its simplest form, it consists of a husband, wife and children and in its complex and most common form it is extended including as Mbiti says children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters who may have their own children and other immediate relatives.<sup>302</sup> Membership in families varies in different African communities from adopted and fostered children to servants, slaves and their children.

In the traditional society<sup>303</sup> polygamy was a common marriage practice and such marriages contributed to the extension of relationships of the family by incorporating many more people. Kenyatta<sup>304</sup> Mbiti<sup>305</sup> and Shorter<sup>306</sup> observe that a wider family would include the deceased (ancestors or living dead) members of the family as well as those yet to be born, for the unborn assured the survival of the family. The ancestors played a big role in the dynamics of the family for they maintained a relationship with the extended family through rituals of propitiation by the living and partaking in the rites of passage like birth and naming, initiation, marriage and death.

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<sup>301</sup> Betty Bigombe and Gilbert M. Khadiagala, "Major Trends Affecting Families in Sub-Saharan Africa", in 1.

<sup>302</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann 1969), 107

<sup>303</sup> The term traditional is here used to refer to pre-colonial African society; nevertheless the author is cognizant of the fact that certain traditional aspects of this culture persists especially in rural areas and communities that have not completely embraced the trappings of modernity.

<sup>304</sup> Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life of the Agikuyu* (Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books Reprinted, 1978).

<sup>305</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion and Philosophy*, 107.

<sup>306</sup> Aylward Shorter, *African Culture: An Overview* (Nairobi: Pauline's Publication 1998), 84.

They were regarded as the enforcers of morality, values and culture. Unity of the family is paramount and the head of the household is expected to maintain the cohesion of the family and the solidarity between them. The extended family is long lasting, self-perpetuating and it can last for several generations. As a general rule, extended families are found in rural rather than urban areas. A characteristic feature of the extended family as Mary Getui observes is its kinship ties and networks which prevailed (still prevails) in the lives of the people. She further observes that, kinship “controlled social relationships between people, and it determined the behavior of one individual towards another”<sup>307</sup>. The sense of kinship bound together the entire life of the society. Almost all the concepts connected with human relationships were understood and interpreted through the kinship system. The extended family also provided care for the non-productive members of the society such as the sick, elderly and children<sup>308</sup>.

However, although traditional forms of kinship are lessening in importance due to the continued need for urban and industrialized labor and the consequent increase of labor migration, the strength of kinship ties remain. Extended family forms are well suited for traditional forms of production and exchange where they are found; and they provide personal identity and security; for in Africa, an individual is defined by his/her family. Family thus exists within a complex yet interconnected network of relationships

### **Functions of the Family**

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<sup>307</sup> Mary N. Getui, “The Family, the Church and the Development of the Youth”, in *The Church in African Christianity: Innovative Essays in Ecclesiology*. eds. J.N.K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (Nairobi: Initiatives Ltd., 1990), 75.

<sup>308</sup> Mary Getui, “The Family, the Church and Development”. 75.

The extended family formed/still forms the basis of all social cooperation and responsibility. In traditional society, the wider family was the primary place where an individual exercised his/her freedom. The individual existed in connection to a larger group, including his/her wider family. One acquired their identity from the group and he or she depended on the group for his/her physical and social survival. Through various rites of passage, he/she progressively became a fuller member of the society and took on a role in ensuring the survival of the group through marriage and procreation. Mbiti says that “in traditional life, the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He/she owes his/her existence to other people... the community must therefore make, create or produce the individual...only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his/her being, his own duties, his privileges and responsibilities towards himself/herself and towards other people”.<sup>309</sup>

The extended family provided the individual with a personal and corporeal identity. One was assigned to a particular community with clear roles assigned to them at various stages of life on the basis of age, gender and social status. The cultural, social and moral norms of the community that were applied within the extended family helped an individual to grow into a productive and respected member of the community. Those norms served as a blueprint for his/her life.

The extended family was/is also the first religious community to which an individual belonged. It was through parents, grandparents and other members that one learned about the religious and spiritual heritage. It was possibly where one learnt about God, spirits, ancestors and the afterlife. The extended family was/is also a means of

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<sup>309</sup> Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 108

mutual support. The principle that guides relationships is that of “*Ubuntu*”<sup>310</sup> or as Mbiti puts it, “you are because we are and because you are we are”<sup>311</sup>. The extended family thus becomes a means of social, psychological, moral, material and spiritual support through thick and thin.

### **Changes in Family Structures in Africa**

African society has been undergoing tremendous changes in every facet of its life including family structure and marriage. The factors that are hostile to the African family life and structure are essentially the result of political, social, economic, religious and cultural changes. This change was necessitated by the sudden emergence of independent Africa into the industrialized and urbanized world of the twentieth century. This accelerated change from primal to a modern society upset many traditional family patterns. It is becoming more and more frequent for African families to be split or broken. Urban living has affected the extended family, even with regard to its most immediate connections.

The customs of receiving visitors to one’s home is still strong but is placed at great strains in urban areas. Houses are too small, visiting relatives cost more to feed and tensions are greater. With the disintegration of the extended family comes lessened involvement in relatives and individual affairs. In urban informal settlements where majority live for example in Nairobi<sup>312</sup>, amenities are non-existent and the poor dominate.

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<sup>310</sup> *Ubuntu* (a term found in Bantu languages in East, Central and South Africa), is a concept that encompasses being human, humane, relational, respectful of the dignity of human beings and other creatures and awareness of the interconnectedness of humanity, the earth and other life forces.

<sup>311</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*,

<sup>312</sup> It is estimated that 60% of the population in Nairobi live on 5% of the land in informal settlements. See, National Bureau of Statistics, *National Population Census*, (Nairobi: Government Printer, 2010).

Hence poverty is another distinguishing feature of the family in modern Africa. Luis L. Otero aptly captures this dynamic when he asserts, “In the past, the extended family existed, at present it disappears and changes into a small conjugal two generation family. The family was in the past an institution, now it becomes a private companionship.”<sup>313</sup>

Changes in the structure of the family reflect the enduring tensions between traditional, Christian/religious and modern values and structures. Although there have been widespread accounts of families abandoning key traditional practices in favor of modern ones, the major trend remains the creation of marriage and family organization that draw on both traditional and modern norms. The dominant feature of African families is their ability for innovation and creativity, being able to make new things out of old and to draw forth new solutions from the traditional resources of family institutions. Thus the trend toward modernity has been captured in the gradual transformation of African marriage and family organizations away from corporate kinship and extended families toward nuclear households especially in urban areas and among the educated. This shift stems in part, from the breakdown of collective, kinship oriented systems of production and reproduction.

Despite internal differences between urban and rural settings and among African regions, the slow rates of economic growth and mismatch between educational outcomes and labor opportunities have compelled smaller family size. Bingome and Khadiagala observe that, “in most urban areas, factors such as wage labor, the monetized economy and cost of living, have altered the value of children. In addition, while family networks

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<sup>313</sup> Luis Lerere Otero, ed., *Beyond the Nuclear Family Model: Cross Cultural Perspectives*. (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 18.

previously mediated the negative effects of large families, resource constraints and economic decline have contributed to the reduction of family sizes and denuded the institutional structures of the extended family.<sup>314</sup>”

However, a critical continuity in African family patterns relates to the persistence of polygyny. Hence, the much anticipated decline in polygamous households by sociologists is still far from a social reality in most African societies. In rural areas, polygyny survives largely due to the imperative established by the sexual division of labor that marks the sphere of agriculture while in urban areas it takes diverse forms like concubinage and serial polygamy.

Magesa also argues that, the imposition of the patrilineal system and customs on matrilineal communities in Tanzania and by extension to all such families in Ghana, Zambia and Namibia, by the missionaries and other agents, caused multiple and complex changes in some important African values. Hence, “by introducing patrilineal system and through the practice of paying bride wealth, the capitalistic economic system and the concept of nuclear family; the communal responsibility of bringing up children, common in traditional family set up was undermined.<sup>315</sup>” Children’s education, socialization and protection were a communal responsibility in traditional society in line with the *ubuntu* philosophy. Consequently, there were no cases of orphaned and vulnerable children as we know them today. The phenomenon of street children in urban settings in African cities is a consequence the evolvement of a society that no longer cares for its young.

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<sup>314</sup> Betty Bigombe and Gilbert M. Khadiagala, “Major Trends Affecting Families in Sub-Saharan Africa”, 8

<sup>315</sup> Magesa, “Reconstructing the African Family”, 13.

Today also, children learn from their peers and media (print and electronic) and social media. This has resulted in the undermining of the authority of the family for the children may sometimes be more knowledgeable than their parents<sup>316</sup>. These changes have bred an individualistic culture and have contributed to many social ills among them, disintegration of the family structure, cohabitation, neglect of families left in rural areas, sexual immorality, drug abuse, alcoholism, child abuse and neglect. Families are now neo-local, living far away from the extended family. The consequence of this is the fragility of marriage since families no longer have the support system; moral, social and spiritual from the elders. Separation and divorce are now more frequent.<sup>317</sup>

Another social change that is undermining the kinship based family structures is the prevalence of single parenthood particularly among urban women. As increasing numbers of women join the workforce; single and female headed households have become a discernable pattern on the African social landscape. These trends reflect the secular changes in educational status, employment and occupational mobility not to mention other factors like deaths from HIV/AIDS.

Africa's overpopulated informal settlements are populated with unmarried single and poor women who face considerable challenges in overcoming dislocation, migration, poverty and deprivation. In some countries like Kenya, Ghana, South Africa, Ethiopia and Zambia, over one third of the households are female headed. Others are headed by grandparents and children. In South Africa, Apartheid policies in many forms in South Africa, "directly impacted family cohesion and reinforced the destructive influences that

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<sup>316</sup> George M. D. Fihavango, "Leadership in the Family Structure in the New Testament", in *Marriage and Family in African Christianity*, ed. A. N. Kyomo and S. G. Selvan (Nairobi: Acton Publishers. 2004), 185.

<sup>317</sup> Fihavango, "Leadership in the Family Structure in the New Testament", 187.

migrant labor, urbanization, industrialization had on the family.”<sup>318</sup> Thus the consequence of the legacy of Apartheid is the high number of single parent families,, resulting largely from pregnancy outside marriage and from divorce. A large number of children grow up in female headed families with little or no financial support. It has been argued that the Black family in South Africa has continued to suffer greater disintegration than other families on the continent. According a report by South African Institute of Race Relations; “only 35% of children were living with their biological parents” by 2010. Of these, 40% were living with their mothers’ and 2.8% with their fathers. This leaves 22.6% of children who were living with neither of their biological parents”<sup>319</sup>.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has also had a tremendous impact on family in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is more striking in the increase in orphans and child-headed families. A study issued by UNICEF in 2010 showed that there were 13,000,000 orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa<sup>320</sup>. Their condition is exacerbated by poverty, poor health and lack of access to health care, in access to education, housing and other crucial necessities. These children who are both double and single orphans are usually cared for by older siblings or grandparents. This is particularly more prevalent among Black African communities than in other races.

Another challenge related to this is the increase in the number and proportion of absent fathers resulting in what Pastor Simon Mbevi of Transform Nations calls a “crisis

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<sup>318</sup> Betty Bigombe and Gilbert M. Khadiagala, “Major Trends Affecting Families in Sub-Saharan Africa”,

<sup>319</sup> Lucy, Holborn and Gail Eddy, *First Steps to Healing South African Family*. (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 2011) 3.

<sup>320</sup> Missionaries of Africa, “Orphaned and Alone”, [missionariesafrica.org/articles/sr/SpRtp/Fall06.html](http://missionariesafrica.org/articles/sr/SpRtp/Fall06.html)



of fatherhood.<sup>321</sup> Scholars argue that, boys who grow up in absent father household are more likely to display “hyper masculine behavior including aggression. This also associated with poor educational outcomes, antisocial behavior, delinquency and disrupted employment later in life<sup>322</sup>”.

Fosterage is a characteristic that however survives in African family structure where the survival of the urban family is sustained by ties with the urban households. A key feature of this is the channeling of remittances from urban workers to rural relatives through educational and other economic and social support. In much of Africa, migration forms a significant component of the livelihood systems of families. For years, internal migration from rural to urban areas has been the essential mechanism for job opportunities, social mobility and income transfers. Nearly 32% of Sub-Saharan African lived in urban areas in 1996 up from 11% in 1950. The UN projects that nearly 50% of Sub-Saharan Africa population will be urban by 2025.

New family structures have emerged due to the phenomenon of migration. Globalization has also fostered new forms of migration as Africans seek better economic opportunities in Europe, USA, UK, Middle East, Australia, Canada South Africa and Botswana. For majority of these migrants, migration is part of the struggle against both debilitating poverty and implicit and explicit forms of political oppression. Africa’s record of civil war, conflict, political instability has to a large extent contributed to migration and the disintegration of the African family. Like rural-urban migration, international migration is a double edged sword to families, furnishing economic benefits

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<sup>321</sup>Pastor Simon Mbevi made this statement during a talk show at Kenyatta when he addressed the topic of “Reconfiguring Masculinities”, March 5<sup>th</sup> 2015.

<sup>322</sup> Holborn and Eddy, *First Steps to Healing South African Family*, 4

through remittances, but also breaking the social bonds that sustain families<sup>323</sup>. Trafficking in children in close border interactions has also affected the African family. Traffickers keep victims in subservience through physical violence, debt bondage, passport confiscation and threats of violence against their families.

Another scourge that has led to the downward spiral of the African family is domestic violence, a taboo subject which despite well intentioned legislation national, regional and global has continued unabated to wreck families. Gender based violence affects people of all classes, creed, race or ethnicity. The family and home which are supposed to be the safest spaces for women, men and children have become sites of struggle, pain, abuse, neglect and disintegration. The latest *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey*<sup>324</sup> observes that 49% of women and 9% of men have reported being violated by an intimate partner.

Domestic violence in all its forms has been destroying the African family. It is worth noting that the different forms of domestic violence; cultural, economic, social, psychological, spiritual, physical and emotional are symptoms of a deeper malady. The root cause lies in the patriarchal culture in the society we live in. It is my contention that biblical, African and contemporary culture which form the environment in which African women live; have significantly contributed to the objectification of women thus rendering them vulnerable to abuse and violation. Some cultures even describe wife battering as “discipline” and women are socialized to expect it.

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<sup>323</sup> Betty Bigombe and Gilbert M. Khadiagala, “Major Trends Affecting Families in Sub-Saharan Africa” 11-15,

<sup>324</sup> Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, *Kenya Demographic and Health Survey*, (Nairobi: Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2014) 60.

Domestic violence has contributed to separation, divorce and in extreme cases death of men, women and children thus weakening and destroying families. The Church in Africa has a critical responsibility to play in creating awareness and highlighting the shameful and sinful practice of domestic violence. It should speak out against the violence and develop pastoral and theological responses. I have yet to see a policy on Gender Based Violence from the Church which I consider a necessity, if appropriate responses are to be developed and made available. If the family has to become a model for Church and on which the Gospel of the family and theology of the family is to be based, it has to be expunged of this and its multifaceted forms be acknowledged.

However, despite all these challenges the family support systems continue to be alive in Africa. The family is still the locus of transmission of values, acquisition of identity and provides a framework of inclusion regardless of one's character, age, status etc. A Gikuyu proverb succinctly captures this when it says, "*Mwana muciare ndateagwo*", (once a child is born, he/she cannot be abandoned".

From the above discussion, what does a gospel of the family mean under these circumstances? What does the Church teach about family? What are the markers of such a Gospel? What can African theology contribute to the world Church? It is to this that we shall now turn.

### **Towards a Gospel of the Family**

Throughout the centuries, the Catholic Church has constantly taught about marriage and the family. The Church considers the family as the starting point or nucleus of society through which the cultural and spiritual values are laid and transmitted. One of the most

profound teachings is captured in the Vatican II document, the Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern (*Lumen Gentium*). This document devotes a chapter to promote the dignity of marriage and the family. Marriage is seen as a community of life and love. The family is perceived as a miniature Church and a parish or a congregation as an extension of the family<sup>325</sup>. It is also a “domestic Church”. The Church in the Modern World (*Gaudium et Spes*) places “love at the center of family and manifesting at the same time the truth of this love in counter distinction to the various forms of reductionism present in contemporary culture”<sup>326</sup>.

Catholic Social Teaching holds that, the family is the basic social unit of every society and a society is only as healthy, as stable, as energetic and as imbued with moral values as its families. The life of the Church therefore depends upon its families. In the *Letter to Families*, Pope John Paul II describes the family as the “heart of the center of the civilization of love”<sup>327</sup> and that the family constitutes the basic cell of community. In *Centesimus Annus* (On the Hundredth Year) Pope John Paul II depicts the family as the first and fundamental structure for a ‘human ecology’ “founded on marriage, in which the mutual gift of self as husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny”<sup>328</sup>.

The family is also depicted as a miniature domestic church with a missionary dimension “which is grounded in the Sacrament of Baptism and achieved by fulfilling

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<sup>325</sup> C f. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*), 11

<sup>326</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 47-52; *Instrumentum Laboris*.

<sup>327</sup> John Paul II, *Letter to Families*, (Nairobi: Pauline’s Publication Africa, 1994), nos. 6-7.

<sup>328</sup> John Paul II, *On the Hundredth Year (Centesimus Annus)*, (Nairobi: Pauline’s Publications Africa, 1991) no.39

one's proper task within the Christian community".<sup>329</sup> The family by its very nature is a nurturer of young people, witnessing to them as they make critical decisions in life. On their part, the Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar (SECAM),<sup>330</sup> in their contribution to the 14<sup>th</sup> General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on the Family, affirm the Social Teaching of the Church on the family and so too the Instrumentum Laboris<sup>331</sup> of the XIV Ordinary General Assembly of Bishops, 2015 and the report of the AMECEA 18<sup>TH</sup> Plenary held in Malawi in 2014<sup>332</sup>. They however observe that the true essence of the family is being eroded and described the status of the family as in crisis. The Church according to the AMECEA bishops needs to learn lessons from African culture where the role of the family is considered very fundamental and the source of life. The value of the family is also enshrined in constitutions in Africa and in the African Charter of Human Rights, an affirmation of the importance ascribed to it.

The Symposium of Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar,<sup>333</sup> draws attention to the challenges the family is facing today ranging from pauperization occasioned by anthropological, social, financial, spiritual perspectives; social exclusion, poverty, ecological challenges, foreign/secular values, political instability and ethnic conflicts to disregard for the elderly, infirm, widows, orphans, people with disability and children. This crisis therefore, becomes a Kairos moment for the Church to safe guard the

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<sup>329</sup> *Gaudium et Spes*, 48

<sup>330</sup> SECAM, *The Future of the Family, Our Vision: Contribution to the 14<sup>th</sup> General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Family*. (Nairobi: Pauline's, 2015)

<sup>331</sup> *Instrumentum Laboris: The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and the Contemporary World*.

(Nairobi: Paulines ,2015),39-42

<sup>332</sup> Edwin Mauluka, "AMECEA Conference concludes, "African Family is in Crisis", *Malawi Voice*, *amecea-conference.concludes-africa-family crisis*. Accessed 14<sup>th</sup> July 2015

<sup>333</sup> SECAM, *The Future of the Family, Our Vision: Contribution to the 14<sup>th</sup> General Ordinary Assembly of the Synod of Bishops on Family*. (Nairobi: Pauline's, 2015)

dignity of the human person and combat practices that do not honor the Gospel or African tradition. I agree with the proposal by the Synod Fathers that which “recommend(s) that our pastoral challenges develop spiritual, psychological, legal and moral structures for the promotion of rights of widows, orphans and the family of the departed,<sup>334</sup>” (especially when widows and orphans are mistreated and deprived of the rights to property when a husband /parent dies). The Church must engage other disciplines to be able to develop a responsive theology and to understand issues affecting the African Family.

The Report also identifies the challenge of Polygamy and the Fathers call upon African Christians and people “to promote the monogamous dimension of marriage in Africa which is open to the teaching of scripture on the uniqueness and the indissolubility of marriage...The pastoral attitude towards polygamist must avoid anything that could appear as a recognition of polygamy by the Church”<sup>335</sup>. The question is, does the Church in Africa and worldwide truly and comprehensively understand the cultural challenges facing the family today? It is not enough to give pastoral responses for example with regard to polygamy that were provided at the initial evangelization in the nineteenth century. Why has polygamy persisted even among Christians who may on the surface be regarded as “model Christians”? It is not enough to ask clergy to “exercise the power that Christ has entrusted them to discern and find appropriate responses to the situation”<sup>336</sup>. Such an open attitude is tantamount to giving negligible pastoral guidance and leaving converts in confusion as well as with feelings of exclusion and being judged

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<sup>334</sup> SECAM, The Future of the Family, #32.

<sup>335</sup> SECAM, The Future of the Family, #40.

<sup>336</sup> SECAM, The Future of Family., #42.

harshly. It does not also help the clergy to devise appropriate and helpful pastoral and theological responses that are driven by divine mercy.

Certain doctrines about marriage within the Church are therefore being challenged due to the crises the family is experiencing while others seem not to be viable since they have not responded to the “signs of the times”. Such would also include divorce, remarriage, and admission into the sacraments to the divorced, remarried and those cohabiting and relations between spouses within marriage. Cardinal Kasper argues that “while the Church must remain faithful to its teaching on the indissolubility of the Sacrament of marriage, it is vital to help, support and encourage those experiencing difficulties in their family life”<sup>337</sup>. While perseverance, commitment, and patience are called for, it is sometimes important to recognize that a marriage environment can be so toxic that it negates the purpose of marriage and it is not healthy to live in such an environment.

My argument is that nobody enters marriage with the intention of leaving but circumstances may dictate otherwise. Should a devout person who leaves such an environment be restricted to “spiritual communion” and be denied “sacramental communion” when they have had to choose between life and death? Would the Church rather tolerate “ritualization” of the sacraments rather than promoting the wellbeing of people trying to raise their families and living a life of faith? Sometimes, laws can themselves be an obstacle to the experiencing the fullness of life that Christ promises.

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<sup>337</sup> Cardinal Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*, (Paulist Press, 2015).

A gospel of the family would require a listening, empathetic response to hurting families and a mediation of mercy according to each circumstance as Jesus did. As Kasper again observes, “the doctrine of the Church is not an ideology in the clouds but God wants us to be present, close to His people”<sup>338</sup> The Church needs to explain in a new way what is family and matrimony in order to help people and at the same time remain true to the Gospel. It needs to be a listening Church to hear the faithful and their cry. This also means a revision of pastoral practices in a manner that is consistent with the myriad challenges the family is facing and its new formations (single parent families, step families, child headed families and grandparent headed families). There is need to provide pastoral care the way Jesus did and understanding divine mercy in responding to families in crisis. There should also be adequate preparation for marriage for young people and continuous formation. The tendency for many young people is to seek “church services” for baptism of their children and other sacraments and to ignore the church in most of their lives.

The values that still persist in the African family of mutual care, solidarity, marriage and family as a communal affair and care for the vulnerable are an important first step in the evolution of a Gospel of the family that is relevant for Africa and could also be a contribution to the world Church.

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<sup>338</sup> Cardinal Walter Kasper, *The Gospel of the Family*.



Family and Marriage in Kenya Today: Pastoral Guidelines for a Process of Discussion and Action

**Results of the Consultation in Kenya on the 46 Questions in the Lineamenta (guidelines) on The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World**

INTRODUCTION

**Dear People of God in Kenya,**

**Peace to you all!**

We invite you to participate in a very important “discernment process” in identifying the challenges and finding the pastoral solutions to family and marriage in Kenya today.

For two years, the Catholic Church in Kenya has been involved in what Pope Francis calls an ongoing synodal process and journey. He states: “May we all then pray together so that through these events the Catholic Church will undertake a true journey of discernment and adopt the necessary pastoral means to help families face their present challenges with the light and strength that comes from the Gospel.”

Most recently the Kenyan Bishops sent to Rome on 15 April, 2015 a 37-page document called Results of the Consultation in Kenya on the 46 Questions in the Lineamenta on The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World. The opening words state: “The Local Church in Kenya, and in particular the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), is happy to share its pastoral experiences of family and marriage in Kenya with the Catholic Church worldwide.”

We coordinated a long and in-depth consultation and the answers to all the 46 questions were compiled from many sources: Catholic dioceses and parishes, Commissions and National Offices at KCCB, academic institutions, lay movements, other ecclesial associations especially of married couples and Small Christian Communities

(SCCs). For example, Nakuru Diocese produced a report of 25 pages.

Kenyan lay people were eager to discuss the challenges and pastoral solutions for cohabitation (called “come we stay”), high dowry payment (one of the main reasons why 60% of the Catholic couples in Nairobi Archdiocese have not sacramentalized their marriages and so cannot receive the Holy Eucharist), how to communicate with the

young generation (especially the Generation Youth of 18-22 year olds) and better parenting. A key insight is that lay people are saying, “We are the church, family and marriage are our responsibilities.”

The compilation of the responses was done by an eight member team and another team of ten edited the final draft coordinated by the KCCB National Family Life Programme.

Both teams tried to respond to Pope Francis’ call, “be bold and creative” in finding new pastoral solutions (“think outside the box”).

By 15 July, 2015 the Synod of Bishops Office in Rome will produce the Instrumentum Laboris (Latin for “Working Document”) for the next synodal assembly to take place in Rome from 4-25 October, 2015. The two delegates from Kenya to this Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops are Cardinal John Njue, the Archbishop of Nairobi and Chairman of the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) and Bishop James Maria Wainaina the Bishop of Muranga Diocese. Hopefully a Kenyan married couple will also be chosen to participate in the synod.

Due to the positive response to our answers from Kenya, we decided to edit this document and print it in the user- friendly booklet form that you are now reading: Family and Marriage in Kenya Today: Pastoral Guidelines for a Process of Discussion and Action. We hope that you will pray over these answers, reflect on them and discuss them in various meetings coordinated by our Family Life Offices, in small groups involved in family and marriage ministry and in 45,000 SCCs in Kenya. Pope Francis urges us to find concrete, practical, pastoral solutions for our local African reality.

As part of our ongoing pastoral process, the Family Life National Office will collate your comments, reflections and pastoral solutions and give them to the Kenyan delegates before they go to Rome in October, 2015.

Please visit the Family Life National Office Page on the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB) Website (<http://www.kccb.or.ke>). The goal of the Family Life National Office is to promote responsible parenthood and is mandated by the bishops to handle all family related groups and associations. The page has a special section called “Family and Marriage in Kenya” that includes:

Relatio Synodi (Report of the Synod) of the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops: “The Pastoral Challenges of the Family in the Context of Evangelization” (5-19 October 2014). This document is being used as the Lineamenta

(“Guidelines”) for the Fourteenth Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in Rome from 4-25 October, 2015 and contains **46 questions**.

Results of the Consultation in Kenya on the 46 Questions in the Lineamenta on The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World. Kenya and the Survey for the Synod on the Family

<http://www.americamagazine.org/content/dispatches/kenya-and-survey-synod-family>

Catholic Justice and Peace Commission, Build Our Family and Nation with Dignity: Today’s Seeds, Tomorrow’s Harvest, Kenya Lenten Campaign, 2015. See especially Week Three on “Family and Social Morality” with the question: “What can we do as family or Small Christian Community to promote Christian values in our families?”

<http://www.cjpckkenya.org/index.php?page=programs&fid=1>

Family and Marriage in Kenya Today: Pastoral Guidelines for a Process of Discussion and Action.

**May the Holy Spirit guide our whole discernment process.**

**Sincerely in Christ,**

**Rt. Rev. Bishop Salesius Mugambi**

**Chairman of the National Family Life Programme**

Results of the Consultation in Kenya on the 46 Questions in the Lineamenta (guidelines) on The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and Contemporary World

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The Catholic Church in Kenya, through the Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB), is happy to share its pastoral experiences on the vocation and mission of the family and marriage in the Church and Contemporary World.

In response to Pope Francis’ call: “be bold and creative, think outside the box” in finding new pastoral solution, the local Church in Kenya carried out an in-depth consultation from Parishes, Small Christian Communities (SCCs), lay movements and other ecclesial associations across the country. Feedback was also sought from commissions and National offices at KCCB including academic institutions. The following responses to the 46 questions were compiled.

Preliminary Question:

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**Does the description of the various familial situations in the Relatio Synodi correspond to what exists in the Church and society today? What missing aspects should be included?**

After an in-depth review of the Relatio Synodi, the respondents identified the following as some of the missing aspects:

1. Children are seen as the objects and receivers of pastoral and missionary care, yet they can also be the subjects of promoting family relationships and family life, active participants in Church life (for example, the liturgy) and agents of evangelization (PMC).
2. The context on traditional marriage and practices (traditional family, community values, rites of passage and communal spirit).
3. HIV/AIDS in relation to family and marriage.
4. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).
5. Child-headed households.
6. The influence of witchcraft and superstition on the African families.
7. Euthanasia.
8. The importance of Small Christian Communities (SCCs) in promoting family and marriage ministry.
9. Good and responsible parenting.

#### PART I

Q. 1. Challenges of the family in our context:

**What initiatives are taking place and what are those planned in relation to the challenges these cultural changes pose to the family (cf. ns. 6 – 7): which initiatives are geared to reawaken an awareness of God’s presence in family life; to teaching and establishing sound interpersonal relationships; to fostering social and economic policies useful to the family; to alleviating difficulties associated with attention given to children, the elderly and family members who are ill; and to addressing more specific cultural factors present in the local Church?**

*a) Challenges of the family in our context include:*

1. Arranged marriages.

2. Negative effects of polygamy (Polygamy hinders monogamy in relation to Matrimony as a Sacrament).
3. Loneliness brought about by absentee spouses.
4. Early marriage.
5. Street families.
6. Migration due to many factors like war.
7. Unemployment (many young people completing studies with no employment opportunities available for them).
8. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are giving offers on artificial family planning methods which have negative effects.
9. The rapid growth of Evangelical churches and sects has drawn a number of Catholics from our Church.
10. Cohabitation (popularly called “come we stay”) with no intention of legally binding relations.
11. Mpango Wa Kando (Swahili meaning for a side relationship, concurrent partnership, a “jump-off”, a casual sexual partner or an extramarital partner.
12. Practicing Catholics are fewer compared to numerical Catholics.
13. In interreligious marriages, some children are not allowed to practice the Catholic faith. This has led to disintegration of families.
14. Single parent families.
15. Divorce and separation especially among the young couples.
16. Drug abuse and alcoholism.
17. Physical violence.
18. Conflict over family resources.
  
19. Child Labour.
20. Sexual exploitation and abuse.
21. Some marriage laws in Kenyan contradict the Catholic Church teaching on marriage and the family.

***b) The initiatives taking place include:***

1. Strengthening the Family Life Programme in the Arc/dioceses.
2. Establishing community development programmes that address the vulnerable groups so as to promote and defend their dignity.
3. Continuous catechesis on the dignity of marriage and family life through print and electronic media, seminars to various groups and associations of the Church.
4. Introduction of family data in the Parishes.
5. Encouraging family members to be living witnesses to each other in the society.
6. Presence of working tribunal in the metropolitans and dioceses to handle marriage

issues.

7. Taking care of street children- through children's welfare programme.
8. Liaison committee developing child protection policies.
9. Counseling programmes for the separated couples at the parish levels.
10. Roll out of Income generating projects at different levels.
11. Taking care of the aged and sick by Small Christian Communities (SCCs) and church-run homes.
12. Help from mission hospitals and institutions.
13. Ongoing formation; (as encouraged by Vatican council II) with preference in counseling, family life and social ministries.
14. Thorough preparation of young adults planning to wed.

Q. 2. Analytical tools

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**What analytical tools are currently being used in these times of anthropological and cultural changes; what are the more significant positive or negative results? (cf. n. 5)**

a) Conducting a census in a particular area.

**Significant positive results are:**

1. The two methods of the Pastoral Cycle have been used effectively, they are:
  - The four steps of Insertion, Social Analysis, Theological and Reflection
  - The three Pastoral Action of See, Judge and Act.
2. Better estimation of the population (demographics, economic status, number of households.
3. Equitable distribution of resources.
4. Youth empowerment.
5. Ongoing catechesis.

**Significant negative results are:**

1. Unfavorable government policies targeting the family unit, e.g. ontraceptives leading to family disintegration.
2. Use of demographic information for negative political ambitions, e.g. division of political boundaries, negative ethnicity, etc.

b) Enactment of laws

Significant positive results are:

1. Progressive laws that protect the vulnerable, Women, Children and the Youth e.g. Children's Act.
2. Laws seeking to address social ills such as drugs and alcohol.

#### Significant negative results

1. Some laws are negative to the family institution, e.g. proposed bills to legalize abortion, same sex marriage.
2. Irresponsible use of social media, the internet, podcast, website and publications.

#### Q. 3. Church's presence in extreme situations

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Beyond proclaiming God's Word and pointing out extreme situations, how does the Church choose to be present "as Church" and to draw near families in extreme situations? (cf. n. 8).

##### a) The church makes its presence felt in extreme situations by/through:

1. Sensitizing the people on the dangers of negative laws and conflicts to the family unit, etc.
2. The Church coming out very strongly to defend the family values.
3. Stressing the ministry of reconciliation and encouraging the people to frequent the Sacrament of reconciliation.
4. Spiritual and corporal works of mercy.
5. Provision of material assistance for special cases.

##### b) Church's initiative in seeking to prevent these situations is through:

1. The use of electronic and print media to point out the extreme situations to the public, e.g. pastoral letters, press releases, etc.
2. Continuous sensitization/training of people to highlight the dangers posed to the families.
3. Sound formation of young people preparing for marriage.
4. Participation in Bible apostolate.
5. Catholic Charismatic Renewal.
6. Taking care of family members in different groups (CMA, CWA, PMS, PMC, Youth, etc.)
7. Apostolate of religious.

8. Caring for commercial sex workers and destitute children

9. Table banking and self-help groups.

10. Interdenominational meetings (Ecumenism).

11. Bible translation to local languages support.

c) What to do to support and strengthen families of believers and those faithful to the bond of marriage:

1. Encourage church movements that promote family life, e.g. Marriage Encounter, Couples for Christ, The Faithful House, and Education for Life etc.

2. Emphasis on the dignity of marriage as a Sacrament.

3. Formation of Small Christian Communities, fellowships, symposia on marriage, etc.

Q. 4. Church's pastoral response

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How does the Church respond, in her pastoral activity, to the diffusion of cultural relativism in secularized society and to the consequent rejection, on the part of many, of the model of family formed by a man and woman united in the marriage and open to life?

1. Cultural relativism refers to the notion that everything is measured according to one's cultural inclinations. These inclinations are repugnant to the universal Christian doctrine.

2. The church responds by emphasizing the universal Christian culture (doctrine) which should be the mirror of all cultures. The church reaffirms the truth as revealed in the Sacred Scripture, affirmed by the Sacred Traditions and taught by the Magisterium.

3. The Church teaches that marriage should be between man and woman and that marriage is not a mere contract of time but a covenant forever. The church upholds love as core virtue to marriage that God is Love, and in Love he lives a mystery of personal loving communion. Children are gift from God which comes as a results of sharing this Love.

4. She responds by stressing God's Plan for the family unit and its role in creation and salvation.

5. By doing this, she illuminates the truth that other "alternatives" fall short of God's plan and are contrary to it.

6. Monogamy introduced as novelty to polygamous marriage.

7. Fighting artificial birth control methods and teaching/promoting Natural



Family Planning.

8. Fighting/Taking measures in condemning any other union which is not divinely designed.

9. Bishops speaking out on family issues.

Q. 5. Importance of Affectivity in Life

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a). How do Christian families bear witness, for succeeding generations, to the development and growth of a life of sentiment? (cf. ns. 9 – 10

1. Instilling discipline and knowledge that human freedom is not absolute, but has limitations. All this is for the common good of the society.

2. Living the Gospel of the family by gathering for the sacred scripture and Church teaching and doing so joyfully is the best testimony.

3. By living faithful to marriage, the Christian families evangelize the virtue of faithfulness.

4. The Church has allowed several movements e.g. Pro-life, Family Life, Marriage Encounter, The Faithful House, to reinforce and bear witness to Christian and oppose vices that oppose the dignity of chaste marriages and full commitment in marriage.

b) In this regard, how might the formation of ordained ministers be improved?

1. Revisit what is taught in the formation houses by giving more attention to family life for ordained ministers.

2. Taking them for professional training in counseling, communication skills and legal matters,

3. Ordained ministers need to demonstrate clearly when helping the laity to bear witness in their formation. They should be made to realize that they are not just guides or guardians but are an integral part of the process.

4. Adequate orientation sessions aimed at preparing the ordained ministers to address the current challenges facing the family/marriage.

5. Employing a dynamic pastoral approach to marriage.

c) What qualified persons are urgently needed in this pastoral activity?

1. Well catechized couples who have experience in marriage and are living witnesses.

2. Agents of evangelization, e.g. catechists, priests/pastors and Small Christian Community animators.
3. Professional marriage counselors.
4. Psychologists and other agents of change.
5. Social pastoral workers
6. Trained Personnel in Natural Family Planning.
7. Teachers for family life education programmes.
8. Children welfare officers.

Q. 6. Pastoral Challenges

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a). To what extent and by what means is the ordinary pastoral care of families addressed to those on the periphery? (cf. n. 11).

1. Not to a large extent (Adequate Catechesis, material assistance, counselling is required).
2. Integrating pastoral and spiritual care into the programming activities targeting the people on the periphery, e.g. the divorced, separated and the widowed just as Jesus did out of love and mercy.

b) What are the operational guidelines available to foster and appreciate the “desire to form a family” planted by the Creator in the heart of every person, especially among young people, including those in family situations which do not correspond to the Christian vision?

1. Often the Local Church of Kenya forms supportive groups to cater for the people’s special needs e.g. in the Small Christian Communities. In the same breath, retroactive validation of marriage is a supportive means to persons wishing to enter into a fuller communion with the church.
2. Teaching them quality family life.
3. Use of couple’s power among parishes. Sensitizing youth groups through inviting successful couples to talk to them.
4. Provide guidance and accompaniment to the couples after marriage.
5. Proper formation of unmarried people planning to marry. Identification and if possible removal of impediments to receiving the sacrament of Matrimony e.g. demand of too much dowry and high cost weddings

c) How do they respond to the Church’s efforts in her mission to them?

1. The response is very positive and they become very active and committed to the mission of the church.
2. They solemnize unions in the Church after proper formation and removal of impediments.

d). How prevalent is natural marriage among the non-baptized, also in relation to the desire to form a family among the young?

1. Natural marriage, is a common phenomenon within our cultural set up among the non-baptized and the young. In light of the modern life, this has had challenges due to the influence of the western culture and the cohabitation tendencies.
2. Proper formation of unmarried people planning to marry. Identification and if possible removal of impediments to receiving the sacrament of matrimony.
3. Some are converted, others need time to adjust and re-orient themselves to God's plan, still others reject God's plan.
4. Traditional marriage is prevalent among the non-baptized. The desire to form a family among the young is strong.

## PART II

Q. 7. Jesus and the Divine Pedagogy in the history of salvation

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a) A fixed gaze on Christ opens up new possibilities. "Indeed, every time we return to the source of the Christian experience, new paths and undreamed of possibilities open up" (n. 12). How is the teaching from Sacred Scripture utilized in pastoral activity on behalf of families?

1. The pastoral activities borrow heavily from the sacred scriptures to catechize the families and attend to them. In Kenya the Catholic Church has 45,000 Small Christian Communities (SCCs). A Small Christian Community is a communion of families in the neighborhood. Many are lectionary- based faith sharing groups. On a weekly basis these SCCs read the Gospel of the following Sunday and connect Jesus' teaching to their everyday life.
2. The teachings from Sacred Scripture are an integral part of catechesis, pastoral activity by clergy, religious life and even the laity must have as their reference the three sources of Divine Revelation, the first of which is the sacred scripture (Illumination of Truth).
3. When preparing couples for marriage they are given references from the

sacred scriptures to study and reflect on.

4. Scripture is used in parishes when Marriage Encounter Programme, CWA, CMA, Charismatic renewal, PMS, PMC, youth and other church groups meet.

b) To what extent does “fixing our gaze on Christ” nourish a pastoral care of the family which is courageous and faithful?

1. Fixing our gaze on Christ compels us to provide pastoral care to families, with love, compassion, and tenderness. Following the guidelines of Pope Francis on The Joy of the Gospel, the Catholic Church in Kenya reaches out to the needy such as People Living with HIV/AIDS, the elderly, Orphans, IDPs (Internally Displaced People), refugees, abandoned babies and child-headed families.

2. Fixing our gaze on Christ we desire to do God’s will always, just like Jesus without compromise whatever the cost.

3. In all these activities Christ is the focal point.

4. Families are constantly reminded to imitate the model family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and the life of the Saints

5. The SCCs are domestic churches and through them the Christians and the families are strengthened to be courageous and faithful.

Q. 8. Marriage and family values

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a) What marriage and family values can be seen to be realized in the life of young people and married couples?

1. Faith in God and the institution of marriage, mutual union/communion, and commitment fostering the civilization of Love and Life.

2. Respect and understanding one another, self-control, hospitality, self-giving, perseverance faithful to themselves and building the culture of Love.

b) What form do they take?

When one marries, it’s no longer me but us, evangelizing the families through forgiveness, reconciliation, lasting union, true witness, and love. Mutual Dialogue in the families, Openness to life, ongoing formation, Enculturating Christian existence theology, liturgy customs and structures, self-propagating, self-reliant and self-sufficient families.

c) Are there values which can be highlighted?

1. Faith and commitment
2. Love, joy, unity and companionship
3. Compassion, forgiveness, sharing (duties in the home, love, joy and sorrows) and coming together to solve problems

d) What sinful aspects are to be avoided and overcome?

Population exploitation, alarming movement, contraceptive mentality, irresponsible parenting, sexual exploitation, negative influence of mass media, marital rape, use of love potion, cohabitation, failure of praying together, abandoning sacramental life, unemployment, child abuse, domestic violence, violent conflict, dis-integration of African family values, negative effects of globalization, ecological degradation, lack of effective communication, infidelity and promiscuity among young people.

Q. 9. Human pedagogy

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What human pedagogy needs to be taken into account; in keeping with divine pedagogy — so as better to understand what is required in the Church's pastoral activity in light of the maturation of a couple's life together which would lead to marriage in the future?

1. The application of the golden rule as a human pedagogy, becomes a paradigm of understanding the word of God by building confidence, familiarity and dignity of human person, created in the image of God, committed to intellectual and spiritual formation and destined to eternal union with God.
2. The sacred scripture reviews Christ in human understanding. Tradition expounds who Jesus is in its traditional symbols and as present today.
3. Marriage as a union put together by God. It is indissoluble. It is also a covenant. Marriage is a sacrament given by the couple. It is easily said but not easily lived. What God has put together no man should put asunder ...
4. The Love and consent which is put together by the marrying couple should be continued, nurtured and renewed. With active participation in the sacramental life and keeping the commandments.
5. Forgiveness and reconciliation should be emphasized to the newly married couples.
6. Mental, Physical, Professional and Psychological developments, (maturation into a responsible adulthood).

Q. 10. Indissolubility of marriage

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What is being done to demonstrate the greatness and beauty of the gift of indissolubility so as to prompt a desire to live it and strengthen it more and more?

1. From an African cultural set up, the institutions of marriage and family are jealously safeguarded by the community. Christianity teaches and encourages unconditional love, respect, forgiveness, peace and reconciliation, drawing strength from the Eucharist, individual and family prayer.
2. Celebrating marriage in a Christian way reaffirms the indissolubility of a marriage union between a man and a woman.
3. Catechesis on the sacrament of marriage and seminars/workshops to those preparing to marry
4. Ongoing formation to the married. Through family life groups such as Marriage Encounter, Couples for Christ, The Faithful House, continuous Family Life Education, Retrouvaille movement (that tries to bring hurting couples together).
5. Participation of couples in parish marriage programs.
6. Christ is the Centre and therefore Christians are taught and advised to follow His teachings.

Q. 11. Inherent weaknesses in marital relations

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a) How can people be helped to understand that a relationship with God can assist couples in overcoming the inherent weaknesses in marital relations?

1. Reading the Gospel periscopes, stories and parables, helps couples to understand their weaknesses and how they can work on them in relation to Gospel stories.
2. Our relationship with God is pegged on our good relationship with fellow human beings and especially between spouses.
3. Deepening the understanding of pastoral activities which build these relationships.
4. Encouraging couples to study the Holy Scripture to understand God better and encounter Him.
5. Helping people to understand that marriage is a covenant between three

people God, woman and man when one is removed then the contract ceases to exist.

6. Emphasizing on the presence of Christ in the family.

7. Encouraging families to put God first. (Come to me all you who labour and are burdened and I will give you rest) Matthew 11:28-30.

b) How do people bear witness to the fact that divine blessings accompany every true marriage?

1. Christians give testimonies about the blessings of God including divine healing.

2. Drawing inspiration from saints (Monica and Augustine, Hannah and Elkanah, Zachariah and Elizabeth, Abraham and Sarah).

3. It is reflected in their way of living.

4. By actively participating in God's work, practicing in sharing and living according to the word of God.

5. By being open to life.

6. Accepting to solemnize marriages in church

c) How do people manifest that the grace of the Sacrament sustains married couples throughout their life together?

1. Marriage union is beyond physicality and it incorporates God's spirit of LOVE.

2. Married couples manifest sustenance of the sacramental grace by; mutual love, forgiveness, reconciliation, joy, endurance, commitment, dialogue,

justice & peace, companionship, living the call of Christ, witnessing to marriage values, ongoing formation and carrying out marriage responsibilities together, the good works in their lives, teaching their children Christian morals, Fidelity in the family is also strengthened.

3. The grace helps them to be reconciled and also to be humble.

4. The Eucharist unites the couple together cf. the sign of peace.

5. Through the use of the sacraments in their lives, they help to facilitate the growth of faith and sacramental life which gives them more graces.

Q. 12. Family in God's Plan

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How can people be made to understand that Christian marriage corresponds to the original plan of God and, thus, one of fulfillment and not confinement?

1. Through teaching the importance of Christian marriage and equality between husband and wife.
2. Ongoing formation of couples with emphasis on sacred scriptures.
3. Catechesis through the word of God, especially before and after marriage.
4. Emphasizing on the sanctity of the institution of marriage as ordained by God with references to sacred scriptures

Q. 13. Domestic Church

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How can the Church be conceived as a “domestic Church” (Lumen Gentium, 11), agent and object of the work of evangelization in service to the Kingdom of God?-

1. The church can be identified as a domestic church in a nuclear family mirrored as an ideal family in the model of the family of Nazareth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.
2. In the context of a family that understands itself as a church and easy to evangelize to each other. The church can be conceived because God’s plan for life was to start in the context of the family
3. Practical way of evangelization is Hodi Hodi (door to door) home visitations by agents of evangelization.
4. The church is consecrated and has the four marks, that is, One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic. Evangelization begins at home cf. Familiaris Consortio where the family is considered as a domestic church.

The couple is consecrated through the sacrament of matrimony there by becoming pillars of the body of Christ who is the primordial principle.

5. The primary aim of the church is salvation of souls through proclamation and evangelization. The matrimonial couple have the duty to evangelize to their children and other couples and the children also have the role of evangelizing to other children.

Q. 14. Missionary work of the Family

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How can an awareness of this missionary task of the family be fostered?



1. Hodi Hodi (door to door) visitations through Small Christian Communities as a way of empowering families so that they are also evangelizers for each other.
2. Devotion and commitment from leaders of evangelization, that is, priests, religious men and women, catechists and the laity.
3. Catechesis for all ages and especially during the formation of young couples preparing to get married.
4. Seminars, workshops, catechesis, SCCs, devotional groups, animation centres and other church groups.
5. Reading sacred scriptures in the family e.g. encyclicals and magisterial teachings on the family.

Q. 15. Family spirituality

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The Lord looks with love at the Christian family and through him the family grows as a true community of life and love. How can a familial spirituality be developed and how can families become places of new life in Christ?

1. By placing love as the primary core of marriage and upbringing of children as the secondary end, hence nurturing Christian virtues.
2. Encourage families to pray and share the word of God together
3. Practicing faithfulness and commitment in marriage by trusting and practicing true Christian worship that enables marriages to become places of new life in Christ,
4. Promote Bible study and establish prayer sanctuaries in homes
5. Encourage Christians to renew sacraments
6. Teaching them the sacramental life and how important it is to live it.
7. Encourage family pilgrimages
8. Embrace Catholic liturgical symbols and gestures to boost Christian spirituality.
9. Teaching family members the value of prayers by encouraging them to pray together for a family that prays together stays together.
10. Teaching them to understand the dignity and sacredness of life so as to live a virtuous life.
11. Encouraging families to be role models in order to give life.
12. Adhering to the family teachings given by Vatican Council II: *Humanae Vitae*, *Familiaris Consortio*, *Evangelium Vitae*, letter to the families and the

theology of the body by St John Paul II.

13. Illustrating how the positive aspects of natural marriage(s) in non-Christian religions are oriented towards Christian marriage which is the manifestation of God's Divine Plan for the family.

Q. 16. Initiative of Catechesis

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What initiatives in catechesis can be developed and fostered to make known and offer assistance to persons in living the Church's teaching on the family, above all in surmounting any possible discrepancy between what is lived and what is professed and in leading to a process of conversion?

1. Encouraging families to embrace the message of love and mercy, reconciliation and forgiveness.
2. Creating forums for people to share their challenges even when solutions are not realized immediately.
3. Emphasizing adoration of Blessed Sacrament.
4. Praying the holy rosary together.
5. Forming ideal family support groups to offer ongoing catechesis of family life.
6. The Clergy working closely with the Laity in seeking solutions to challenges facing the family.
7. Continuous training of couples on Natural Family Planning (NFP) and Holistic family life
8. Incorporating different approaches and methods in teaching Catechism of the Catholic Church.
9. Training more trainers of trainers (TOTs) for family life program using the Holistic approach.
10. Giving the couples who are preparing for marriage enough time for catechetical sessions.
11. Harmonizing catechesis for those preparing for marriage.

Q. 17. Indissoluble and fruitful Marriage

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What initiatives can lead people to understand the value of an indissoluble and fruitful marriage as the path to complete personal fulfilment?

1. Encourage couples to practice mutual self-giving and commitment to each other.
2. Identify successful married couples to mentor young couples and those struggling in their marriages.
3. Promote celebration of marriage anniversaries to inspire other couples.
4. Promote the Family life programme in parishes to help couples appreciate the value of their union.
5. Recommend that those preparing for marriage to do so with the support of Family Life Programme at parish or diocesan levels.
6. Sensitize the young people on the values of marriage and its indissolubility.
7. Challenge parents to remain committed to their duty to create awareness on the value of marriage and its indissolubility through good parent-child relationship.
8. Create understanding among married couples that authentic marriage love is governed and natured by Christ's redeeming power.
9. Use the sacred scripture to highlight examples of people who received complete personal fulfilment as a result of knowing God's plans for marriage.
10. Encourage frequent meetings, seminars, workshops, retreats and recollections for married couples.
11. Provide pastoral Counseling for couples with problems.

Q. 18. Joys of human existence in a family

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What can be done to show that the family has many unique aspects for experiencing the joys of human existence?

1. Give living testimonies that success is genuinely appreciated in the family and that those who fail are easily accepted back with love.
2. Exalt family values and do the will of God.
3. Promote human dignity and respect for human person.
4. Show love in good and difficult times.
5. Encourage movement such as marriage encounter.
6. Enlighten family members about the unique things which can be experienced/ found in the family such as love, care, sharing and growth.

Q. 19. Appreciation of Natural Marriage

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The Second Vatican Council, returning to an ancient ecclesial tradition, expressed an appreciation for natural marriage. To what extent does diocesan pastoral activity acknowledge the value of this popular wisdom as fundamental in culture and society?

1. Teachings and seminars on natural marriage, natural family planning and procreation.
2. Use of print and electronic media to address family issues
3. Permeate human culture and society with the word of God.
4. Stress on enculturation by the Church.
5. The Church appreciates that marriage begins in the families even before it goes to the church.

Q. 20. God's mercy to families

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a) How can people be helped to understand that no one is beyond the mercy of God?

1. Embracing all including those who have been rejected by the society.
2. Restore confidence and hope through Church's pastoral activities and sacraments.
3. Catechizing.
4. Helping people to understand that they are created in the image and likeness of God.
5. Proclaiming the truth about Gods mercy.

b) How can this truth be expressed in the Church's pastoral activity towards families, especially those which are wounded and fragile?

1. Empower families to be evangelizers to their family members and their neighbors.
2. Assist people to understand their weakness and wounds.
3. Pastoral counseling.
4. Reconciliation and forgiveness.
5. Visit the wounded and fragile.
6. Retreats and recollections.
7. Advise and direct them where to go for further help.
8. Clergy, religious, and laity involved in pastoral activities need to be bearers of this message and should discard judgmental attitudes and stereotypes which obscure this message.

Q. 21. Friendly attitude to the wounded and the fragile families

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In the case of those who have not yet arrived at a full understanding of the gift of Christ's love, how can the faithful express a friendly attitude and offer trustworthy guidance without failing to proclaim the demands of the Gospel?

1. Reach out to them by inviting them to seminars, retreats and celebrations.
2. Avoid judging them, make them understand God and expose them to the methods of change.
3. Explain the church's teachings by referring to the sacred scriptures.
4. Live what you profess.
5. Accept, visit and journey with them in the SCC.

Q. 22. Forms of encouragement

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What can be done so that persons in the various forms of union between a man and a woman — in which human values can be present — might experience a sense of respect, trust and encouragement to grow in the Church's good will and be helped to arrive at the fullness of Christian marriage?

1. Provide compassionate pastoral care by following the example of Jesus Christ who did not condemn the Samaritan woman and the one caught in adultery, but told them the truth in a compassionate and merciful way.
2. Encourage young couples to understand that the challenges they face can be overcome.
3. Encourage young couples to internalize the inner values of simple and mass marriages.
4. Encourage Jubilee celebrations of marriages which give testimony and accompany young couples and those facing difficulties in their marriage.
5. Counter the negativity propagated by sections of media against the institution of marriage.
6. Give homilies that address values and simplicity of marriage.
7. Encourage mutual respect and care among the married.

PART III

Q. 23. Family involvement in the formation of priests and other pastoral workers

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a) How is the family emphasized in the formation of priests and other pastoral workers?

1. The vocation comes from the family which is the domestic church.
2. Nurture an interest to appreciate and respond to the different vocations by exhorting, setting and upholding values that become key to responding to the vocation.
3. Increased awareness on different vocations depending on the discussions carried out in the families.
4. The family is the seed of the word of God and where Love is expressed. Receiving the word of God in the family especially the young ones be formed to understanding what God wants of them.
5. Vocations to priestly life and other missionary lives are seen as fruits of a good Christian upbringing that guides a child to discern and embrace the calling.
6. The formation of priests involves training on important aspects of family life e.g. reproductive health, sexuality and NFP. This should be the case also for other pastoral workers.

b) How are families themselves involved?

1. Pray for the vocations and offer spiritual accompaniment to priests, religious and other pastoral workers.
2. Monetary contribution made to facilitate the execution of the missionary mandate comes largely from families
3. Parents in the family are the first teachers of the children's vocation and get the young in this discernment of attending the SCC meetings for prayers and being involved in church activities through PMC, Youth, CWA and CMA.
4. Families are involved by virtue of their being the 'school' in which family life is taught and lived.
5. Tangaza University College, a constituent college of the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, in Nairobi has two courses for future priests and other pastoral workers in which married people teach about the family, family values and marriage. The two courses are "Family Ministry" and "Small Christian Community as a New Model of Church in Africa Today."

6. Most dioceses in Kenya organize seminars and workshops on vocations for class 8 and form 4 leavers.
7. When seminarians are on holiday, the bishop and parents advise them.
8. Families present the candidates, recommend and approve their ordination

Q. 24. Language in pastoral communication

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a) Are people aware that the rapid evolution in society requires a constant attention to language in pastoral communication?

People are aware, to a large extent, of the rapid evolution and the demand to adopt a new pastoral language that is relevant to the prevailing pastoral situation. Several parameters allude to these; the Vatican II call to read the signs of times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel and the recent synod discussion on the New Evangelization.

b) How can an effective testimony be given to the priority of grace in a way that family life is conceived and lived as welcoming the Holy Spirit?

1. Making the teaching on marriage and family life concrete and realistic to address the day to day life experiences and to enhance appreciation of the intrinsic value of the family that cannot be superseded by the changing social trend.
2. Encouraging spouses to draw their strength from Christ Himself who wills that those that “God has joined, no man should put asunder”. This can only be realized when the sacrament of Matrimony is lived fully in respect to the other sacraments especially the Eucharist and Penance.
3. Minimal use of a pastoral language that condemns those who seem not to live according to the teaching without first understanding their peculiar backgrounds.
4. Reconciliation between theory and praxis in regard to issues that are often times dealt with. The presumption that the spouses are conversant with the doctrinal expectation especially in regards to the second end of marriage namely, procreation. Thus, the couples are to be assisted to assimilate the teaching on Natural Family Planning and the position of the Church in regard to the use of contraceptives.
5. The grace received by a couple when they receive the sacrament of Matrimony in the church can be testified to the couples by those whose lives

were changed for the better after solemnizing their marriages in the Church.

6. Revitalization of family groups such as Marriage Encounter, Couples for Christ, the Faithful House, Focolare, Emmanuel Community among others.

Q. 25. Family's dignity and mission

a) In proclaiming the Gospel of the Family, how can the conditions be created so that each family might actually be as God wills and that society might acknowledge the family's dignity and mission?

1. Strong affirmation of family and family life that is truly Christian and truly African.
2. The roles and responsibilities should be shared so as to enhance mutual relation among the family members. The family's dignity is to become a school of holiness modeled after the example of the Holy family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph.
3. The Gospel of the Family must always take recourse to this unique constitution in order to contextualize each member in the family unit illustrating therefore that outside the family there is no life.
4. The family to become more instrumental in formulating the pastoral language of compassion and inclusivity to nurture the aspect of belongingness.
5. The family to help in reconciling between the cultural and Church practices.
6. Discouraging the perception of marriage as a social-economic celebration.
7. Expressing the families' mission through the Pontifical Mission Societies (PMS) especially the Pontifical Missionary Childhood (PMC).

b) What "pastoral conversion" is required?

1. There is need to emphasize the Family Life program in the Local Church.
2. Proper marriage preparation of couples to nurture an interest in a marriage catechesis even after the celebration of the matrimony.
3. Couples should be assisted to discover the dignity of each other.
4. Couples should be assisted to form their consciences upon an understanding of the beauty and complementarity of their different missions as man and woman and the fruitfulness of their love.
5. The church should make it possible for those who desire to live family life as God's will to do so, by always welcoming them with open arms and having pastoral workers available to assist them in times of need.
6. There is need to understand that God meant well for the family. He meant that the man and woman are to live in love and harmony until death does



them part.

7. Children are a gift from God thus issues such as infertility should not make any Christian marriage to break.

c) What further steps towards an in-depth examination are being done to achieve this?

1. Recognizing the incomparable value of each life and vocation.
2. Entering deeply into the primordial sacrament of marriage. That mystery as God's salvific plan in regard to humanity is in a certain sense the central theme of all revelation – its central reality.
3. Allowing those intending to marry to get spouses of their choice.
4. Heeding Pope Francis' call to be more compassionate and merciful like Jesus.
5. Pastoral workers are beginning to grasp the importance of following Christ's example and teachings when engaging families and married couples.
6. Encouraging families to possess evangelization tools like the Bible and other relevant books that expound the Bible for better understanding.
7. Prepare the couples intending to marry in advance.

Q. 26. Collaboration of social and civil institutions on behalf of the family

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a) Are people aware of the importance of the collaboration of social and civil institutions on behalf of the family?

Some are aware but majority are not.

b). How is this actually done?

1. Through the media
2. Seminars and workshops
3. Barazas or public gatherings
4. Awareness programs e.g. I Choose Life, NACADA, etc.;
5. Advocacy campaigns against laws that hurt the family

c). What criteria are used to inspire it?

1. A reactive approach is adopted based on necessity and emerging issues.
2. Effectiveness of advocacy, adherence to church teaching for living family life according to God's will.

d). In this regard, what role can be played by family associations?

1. Discussion
2. Forming social support groups and encouraging the vulnerable
3. Adopting a proactive approach by highlighting impending issues
4. Outreach by church associations and movements based on experiential expertise.
5. Watchdog, advocacy for living family life according to God's will

e). How can this collaboration be sustained even in a bold repudiation of the cultural, economic and political processes which threaten the family?

1. Re-awaken the missionary zeal among the members especially in the Christian families to reach out to the families in crises.
2. The Church to provide materials that will be helpful in family catechesis
3. The church to introduce a family catechesis manual.
4. The church should support the institutions it collaborates with.

Q. 27. Relations between family, society and civil life

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a) How can relations between family, society and civil life be fostered for the benefit of the family?

1. There should be a spiritual formation that exalts the family virtues across the social and civil divide. In Kenya we have wahudumu wa dini (lay ministries of religious education, family life catechesis and marriage counselors) in SCCs and other apostolic groups.
2. Formulation of policies that protect the family unit
3. Encouraging and supporting the families that are in crisis by providing basic needs such as water, shelter, clothing and a safe environment.
4. Given that the family unit is the building block of society, the activities of civil life ought to be oriented towards strengthening family life.
5. There should be education to have proper understanding of the family, society and civil life hence assisting each other in weaknesses and reinforcing each other's potential for the betterment of proper growth.

b). How can the support of the State and the international community be fostered on behalf of the family?

1. The government can be engaged through dialogue to legislate laws that protect and safeguard the family especially governments that are consenting to anti-family trends like same-sex marriages.

2. The state and the international community should take a stand to protect the family unit and care about humanity.

Q. 28. Marriage preparation

a) How is marriage preparation proposed in order to highlight the vocation and mission of the family according to faith in Jesus Christ?

1. Emphasize pre-nuptial preparations that are structured and detailed.
2. Carry out education programs aimed at preparing those at the threshold of marriage.
3. Harmonize the pre-nuptial expectations in marriage realities.

b) Is it proposed as an authentic ecclesial experience?

Yes, marriage is a matrimonial covenant between man and woman who establish a family.

C) How can it be renewed and improved?

1. Seminars and workshops
2. Having periodical family festivals and celebrations that exalts, stress and propagate the family ideal.
3. Family recollections, retreats and pilgrimages to holy places

Q. 29. Catechesis of Christian Initiation

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a) How does the catechesis of Christian initiation present an openness to the vocation and mission of the family?

1. The sacraments of Christian initiation include: Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist.
2. In Baptism one acquires a new identity and relationship as a child of God and a birth into a family. It basically opens one to a vocation of Christian living. This continues to be enhanced through the sacrament of Confirmation where one is mandated and commissioned to perform his Christian responsibilities without faltering. The Holy Eucharist posts a sharing that strengthens the bond.
3. The catechesis of Christian initiation should therefore nurture a sense of belonging to a new family with a confidence and sharing in an unbreakable bond.

b) What practices are seen as most urgent?

Recourse more deeper catechesis.

c) How is the relation among Baptism, Eucharist and marriage proposed?

Baptism is a birth through which one acquires a new identity and dignity while Eucharist brings about the concept of sacrifice, communion and thanksgiving. Marriage should bring about a new identity and sharing between the spouses.

d) What emphasis is given to the character of the catechumenate and mystagogy which is often a part of marriage preparation?

There should be a post marriage Catechesis to the couple. This will help to illustrate and emphasize marriage as a vocation

d) How can the community be involved in this preparation?

1. Accompanying the couples before, during and after the celebration of Holy Matrimony.
2. SCCs starting a ministry of accompanying of newly married couples.
3. Establishing structures to bring couples back to the parish through accompaniment within the first five years of marriage.
4. The accompaniment should be in stages: right from before birth, when the mother is expectant and throughout with themes and teachings.

Q. 30. Marriage preparation and accompanying couples

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a) Does marriage preparation and accompanying couples in the initial years of married life adequately value the important contribution of the witness and sustenance which can be given by families, associations and family movements?

Yes, these contributions are valued but a lot more needs to be done. There are enormous challenges to many young couples who marry without knowing the mystery of marriage therefore experienced couples are of great importance in journeying with younger married couples.

b) What positive experiences can be reported in this regard?

1. Marriage preparations are carried out.
2. Accompaniment is done especially through Family Life Program

3. Formation of support groups especially through the networks of family associations are a vineyard for good families.
4. Taking challenges as opportunities for the growth of married life.
5. Strengthening and empowering sacramental and prayer life.
6. Positive growth in pastoral activities (greater willingness to serve in the church and sense of belonging).
7. Responsible and Positive parenting of the children
8. Being role models to the aspiring and young couples

Q. 31. The pastoral accompaniment of couples

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a) The pastoral accompaniment of couples in the initial years of family life — as observed in synodal discussion — needs further development. What are the most significant initiatives already being undertaken?

Fellowships of young couples, infant baptism for children of these couples, programs about marriage and family life.

b) What elements need further development in parishes, dioceses or associations and movements?

1. Establishment and introduction of structures for accompaniment.
2. Formulation of a family based catechesis, syllabus and guidelines.
3. Pastoral Care of Couples Civilly Married or living together (ns. 41 – 43)
4. Urgent formation of strategies on guidance and counseling in every diocese to rescue breaking marriages.

Q. 32. Pastoral discernment of individual situations

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What criteria in a proper pastoral discernment of individual situations are being considered in light of the Church's teaching in which the primary elements of marriage are unity, indissolubility and openness to life?

1. Marriage originated from God and he created man and woman in his own image and likeness, to multiply and fill the earth. Therefore, the church considers valid marriage between a man and a woman.
2. The love is put in the central point of marriage and that Love between husband and wife, members of the same family brings about deeper communion and strong foundation of marriage.

3. Christian couples are called to cement their faithfulness and love to God.
4. There should be a catechesis that, there are possibilities of the celebration of the canonical form of marriage for those couples civilly married.
5. These couples should also be assisted and prepared for the reception of the sacraments especially noting that this union between the baptized has been raised by Christ, the Lord to the dignity of a sacrament.

Q. 33 Christian community involvement in these situations

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a) Is the Christian community able to be pastorally involved in these situations?

Yes.

b) How can it assist in discerning the positive and negative elements in the life of persons united in a civil marriage so as to guide and sustain them on a path of growth and conversion towards the Sacrament of Matrimony?

1. Identifying them.
2. Holding healthy discussions that will foster a return-to-sacrament attitude.
3. Involvement in the Church activities.
4. Embracing and encouraging them to take up their roles in the Church.
5. Listening to their reasons as to why they have not solemnized their marriage in the Church

c) How can those living together be assisted to decide to marry?

1. Emphasis to be put on the sacrament of Marriage more than the aspect of dowry.
2. Community and Church leadership to be involved in marriage negotiations along with the family members. If need be, the community should be encourage to help with the dowry.
3. Communities to play down the ethnic differences that may hinder the couple from canonical marriage.
4. In inter-ethnic marriages, the families and community need to be involved to harmonize marriages.
5. In inter-faith marriages, the Catholic Church needs to emphasis the equality of partners in marriage.
6. Help the couple to reduce the expenses incurred during wedding/marriage by encouraging them to have simple weddings and join organized mass weddings.

Q. 34. Response to traditional forms of marriage

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In a particular way, what response is to be given to problems arising from the continuity of traditional forms of marriage in stages or those between families?

1. The Church to accompany the couple during the traditional stages of marriage.
2. The Church can embrace the traditional values that are compatible with Christianity.
3. The Church to evangelize the unhealthy cultural practices that deprive the couples of grace.
4. Christian marriage is not supported by the African traditional cultural structures of marriage. There is need to create Christian structures that will support traditional marriage.

Q. 35: Care for wounded families

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a) Is the Christian community in a position to undertake the care of all wounded families so that they can experience the Father's mercy?

1. Yes, some wounded families are bold enough while others shy away from seeking pastoral care from their Christian Community.
2. The church on her own cannot take care of the wounded but she can do that in collaboration with other stakeholders.

b) How does the Christian community engage in removing the social and economic factors which often determine this situation?

i) Social point of view:

1. The concept was to capture the idea of giving security to the family values.
2. The traditional marriage safeguards regulations that preserve the integrity of marriage and families.
3. Marriage was a community entity; not just individual venture.

ii) Church point of view:

We are in a position to safeguard if the church is serious about the sanctity of marriage through:

1. Serious and effective catechesis
2. Effective family life programs
3. Marriage Encounter should be deeply promoted
4. Establishing a very strong functional marriage tribunals, directed by professionals
5. Implementing the country's positive aspects of the Marriage Act, through the Church.

iii) Economically:

1. Through microfinance projects and self-help groups
2. Capacity building e.g. in entrepreneurship
3. Providing affordable goods and services (e.g. Medical, education, food and clothing and shelter)

c). What steps have been taken and what can be done to increase this activity and the sense of mission which sustains it?

Steps taken: Offering pastoral care and counseling services

What can be done?

1. Formation of support groups (marriage encounter and the faithful house) to share daily experience, pray together and encourage each other
2. Establishing alcoholic anonymous (AA) and Rachel's vineyard as pastoral resources.
3. The pastoral care can reach churches through commitment, availability of needed resources, personnel, self-giving and fidelity.
4. Sharing of experiences, resources and personnel between the local churches
5. Twinning of parishes and SCCs to experience sharing.

Q 36: Shared pastoral guidelines

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How can the identification of shared pastoral guidelines be fostered at the level of the particular Church?

1. Particular churches should study their pastoral needs and come up with clear pastoral guidelines and structures to steer their pastoral activities through creation of pastoral offices and departments.
2. Such structures should be extended to the Metropolitan level for effective networking and collaboration.



3. Sharing of experience and information at various levels (Integrated Christian Formation Program (ICFP) in Dioceses and the activities of the Family Life Program at KCCB).
4. Pastoral agents involved in various apostolates.

Q 37: Nullity

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How can the procedure to determine cases of nullity be made more accessible, streamlined and possibly without expense?

To have functioning tribunals at every metropolitan with expert (professional) Canon/civil lawyer. Such service should be pastoral-oriented so that the subjects/clients should access the service at minimal or no cost.

Q 38: Divorced and remarried

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With regard to the divorced and remarried, pastoral practice concerning the sacraments needs to be further studied, including assessment of the Orthodox practice and taking into account “the distinction between an objective sinful situation and extenuating circumstances” (n. 52). What are the prospects in such a case? What is possible? What suggestions can be offered to resolve forms of undue or unnecessary impediments?

### **Suggestions**

1. The couple to follow canonical procedure of annulment of their marriage to avoid the impediment of prior bond.
2. The ecclesiastical tribunals in Kenya to follow due process in adjudicating marriage cases.

Q 39: Legislation: mixed marriages

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Does current legislation provide a valid response to the challenges arising from mixed marriages/inter-religious marriages?

No.

Elements to be taken into consideration:

1. The Catholic Church to foster dialogue between structured/mainstream churches.
2. The Catholic Church to put into consideration the religion of the other spouse which is as dear to them as the Catholic faith.
3. These mixed marriages lead to confusion of Religion by the offspring about the religion to embrace.

Q 40: Care for gay persons

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a) How can the Christian community give pastoral attention to families with persons with homosexual tendencies?

This is a recent phenomenon in the Church and African Cultures. We need guidelines on how to approach people having these challenges.

b) What are the responses that, in light of cultural sensitivities, are considered to be most appropriate? Try to dissuade the gay from practicing and encourage them to marry and have a family.

c) While avoiding any unjust discrimination, how can such persons receive pastoral care in these situations in light of the Gospel?

1. Be kind, merciful and compassionate.
2. Never judge or condemn them but help the person to be aware and get out of the behavior by referring them to trained people to deal with their issues.
3. Educate young people on Christian values

d) How can God's will be proposed to them in their situation?

Encourage them to adhere to the teachings of the Church. Apply the use of Jesus' attitude: "SEE THE SIN NOT THE SINNER"

Q. 41: Beauty of parenthood (motherhood and fatherhood)

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a) What are the most significant steps that have been taken to announce and effectively promote the beauty and dignity of becoming a mother or father, in light, for example, of *Humanae Vitae* of Blessed Pope Paul VI?

The church has actively promoted:

1. Natural Family Planning.
2. Family Life Education.
3. Marriage Encounter.
4. Effective Catechesis.

b) How can dialogue be promoted with the sciences and biomedical technologies in a way that respects the human ecology of reproduction?

1. The church should support all science and technology that does not interfere or negatively affect the natural human reproduction as God designed and purposed it.
2. The dialogue need to be appropriate in promoting the sanctity of life.

Q. 42: Structures & tools of maternity and paternity

---

a) A generous maternity/paternity needs structures and tools. Does the Christian community exercise an effective solidarity and support?

YES. How?

1. The Church leadership encourages young couples to welcome new life through bearing of children.
2. The small Christian communities visits the new parents to congratulate and help them out.
3. There is need for better catechesis to orient the attitude of Christians towards respectful and dignified living of the sacrament of marriage.

b) Is it courageous in proposing valid solutions even at a socio-political level?

1. Laws of adoption must be very clear to guide the church in this venture.
2. Schools as centers of evangelization should be able to create structures and systems of encouraging children to grow spiritually, humanly and intellectually.
3. Children are received as gifts from God.

c) How can adoption and foster-parenting be encouraged as a powerful sign of fruitful generosity?

1. The church can establish homes for orphans that promote adoption locally, right from parish to diocesan level.
2. The Church should actively participate in advocating for laws that support adoption and foster parenting.

d) How can the care and respect of children be promoted?

1. Encourage African generosity, hospitality and sense of communal life. This will help the children to grow in values of solidarity and communion.
2. All children should be celebrated in society. The church should be at the forefront.

Q. 43: Maternity-paternity and vocation

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a) The Christian lives maternity/paternity as a response to a vocation. Is this vocation sufficiently emphasized in catechesis?

No

b) What formation is offered so that it might effectively guide the consciences of married couples?

1. Catechesis/Youth program teachings on vocation of marriage/Family life/Marriage encounter etc.
2. In formation, chastity as a way of life is stressed in marriage that is maternity/paternity.

c) Are people aware of the grave consequences of demographic change?

No. People may not be aware on how societal changes affect perceptions at family, community, national, regional, continental and global levels.

Q. 44: Abortion

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How does the Church combat the scourge of abortion and foster an effective culture of life?

1. Through guidelines which strengthen the pastoral care of the affected.
2. Effective catechesis regarding abortion.
3. Encouraging parents to take care of the child, rather than procuring an abortion.
4. Youth program has structures which teach the consequences of abortion.
5. Promotion of Pro-life programs
6. Teaching on the sanctity of life, dignity and the right to live.

Q. 45: Educational Mission

a) Fulfilling their educational mission is not always easy for parents. Do they find solidarity and support from the Christian community?

1. Yes. The Christian community offers solidarity and support to Christian parents by identifying children who require educational support e.g. orphans and the vulnerable.
2. In the recent times, the schools have become more of business-oriented venture, rather than pastoral.
3. The children in traditional times belonged to the community, and this should be encouraged.
4. Some parents abscond their responsibility of educating their children. Where SCCs are a pastoral priority, they offer support to such parents.

b) What suggestions might be offered in formation?

1. 1. Catholic parents should be advised to give holistic education to their children.
2. 2. Promoting the Pontifical Missionary Childhood (PMC) motto “children helping children”
3. 3. Encouraging children activities e.g. festivals and sports
4. 4. Creating awareness and sensitization on the needs of children
5. 5. Allow children to participate in liturgical activities and not to be left at the periphery
6. 6. Allowing children to interact and witness to others in the SCCs and in Bible Studies
7. 7. Storytelling and Biblical stories should be used for moral and spiritual teaching
8. 8. Encourage Christians to have collective social responsibilities to their children.
9. 9. God is our Father and we are his children, therefore, we should uphold human dignity and respect to all the children in need.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.
- 15.

**c) What steps can be taken to acknowledge the role of parents in raising children, even at the socio-political level?**

1. Safeguard the family unit, support parent’s efforts and protect children’s rights
2. Educate parents on being honest while seeking scholarships/bursaries.
3. Promote children’s council where they can express views
4. Nurture and develop talents in children through talent exploiting groups
5. Allow the children to have peer counseling groups by providing proper formation.

Q. 46: Duty to transmit Faith — Parents and the Christian Community

How can parents and the Christian family be made aware that the duty of transmitting the faith is an intrinsic aspect of being a Christian?

In Matthew 28:16-20 we are commissioned by Jesus by virtue of our baptism to go out to the whole world and preach the good news. Family and marriage ministry should be carried out through:

1. Catechesis
2. Church groups and associations
3. On-going formation at all levels
4. This should be introduced and promoted through marriage catechesis.
5. Both parents (husband and wife) should participate in the SCC together. This models family participation for the children.

## CONCLUSION

### Synod Recommendations

1. There are too many sub questions.
2. There should be simpler language and simpler construction of sentences.
3. For future, have fewer questions.
4. Continue contextualizing the annual statistical questionnaire that every diocese in the world send to Rome e.g. on family ministries, Lay leaders, SCC.
5. The questions have a Western tone or viewpoint and sometimes lack a Global South perspective.

## ACRONYMS AND MEANINGS

**AIDS** Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (a disease of the immune system characterized by increased susceptibility to opportunistic infections).

**Affectivity** Causing emotion or feeling.

**Catechumenate** A person under instruction in the rudiments of Christianity, as in the early church; a neophyte.

**DNFLO** Diocesan and National Family Life Offices

**Doctrinal Of**, relating to, or concerned with doctrine

**Enculturation** The process whereby individuals learn their group's culture, through experience, observation, and instruction.

**E-OGASB** Extra Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

**Evangelium Vitae** (Latin: "The Gospel of Life") is the name of the encyclical written by Pope John Paul II which expresses the position of the Catholic Church

**Familiaris Consortio** (Latin roughly translated as "of family partnership", but titled in English On the role of the Christian Family in the Modern World)

**HIV** Human Immune-deficiency Virus is a variable retrovirus that invades and inactivates helper T cells of the immune system and is a cause of AIDS

**Humanae Vitae** (Latin of Human Life) is an encyclical written by Pope Paul VI

**ICFP** Integrated Christian Formation Program

**Instrumentum** Laboris (Latin for "Working Document")

**Lineamenta** (Latin for "Guidelines") also called the Preparatory Document

**Lumen Gentium:** The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, is one of the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council.

**Magisterium:** The authority and power of the church to teach religious truth.

**Mystagogy:** Instruction given to others before initiation into religious mysteries or before participation in the sacraments.

**NFP:** Natural Family Planning is the general title for the scientific, natural and moral methods of family planning that can help married couples either achieve or postpone pregnancies.

**NGOs:** Non-Governmental Organization

**Novelty:** State or quality of being novel, new, or unique; newness; occurrence, experience, or proceeding:

**Nullity:** The state or quality of being null: nothingness; invalidity.

**OGASB:** Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops

**PC:** Pastoral Cycle

**Relatio Synodi** (Latin for “Report of the Synod”)

**Pedagogy:** The art or science of teaching; education; instructional methods.

**Periscopes:** An optical instrument for viewing objects that are above the level of direct sight or in an otherwise obstructed field of vision, consisting essentially of a tube with an arrangement of prisms or mirrors and, usually, lenses: used especially in submarines.

**PMC** Pontifical Missionary Childhood

**Prenuptial** “Prenuptial” means “prior to marriage”, but is often used to refer to a prenuptial agreement.

**Primordial principle Resonance** – the Primordial Principle of Life. What are resonances and what significance do they have for the organism and life in general?

**Relatio Synodi** Official English Translation of Final Synod Document.

**Repudiation** To reject with disapproval or condemnation

**Salvific Plan** Having the intention or power to bring about salvation or redemption:

**Solemnize:** To perform the ceremony of (marriage)

**Synod** (noun) and **Synodal** (adjective)

**Theory and Praxis:** Praxis is the process by which a theory, lesson, or skill is enacted, embodied, or realised. “Praxis” may also refer to the act of engaging, applying, and exercising

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